

### *Symposium on The Civil Rights of Public School Students*

## For Jack, Lover of Art and Advocate with a Heart

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## FOR JACK, LOVER OF ART AND ADVOCATE WITH A HEART

Richard H. W. Brauer\*

Jack Hiller independently and quietly advocated for struggling causes and people, especially for those involved with the arts around him. I know. For over thirty years, he was my trusted advisor, concerned friend, and committed colleague advocating for an art museum at Valparaiso University.

In 1970, Jack was appointed to VU's Sloan Collection Committee. I wrote of him at that time: "He is a collector. He himself works in fine arts metal, and last Spring he was instrumental in bringing an exhibit of the collage paintings of Ralph Arnold to the Law School, and will, out of his own funds, bring a sculpture exhibit to the Law School this October."

In 1972, law student Robert Nesius told Jack about Hopewell culture artifacts (500 B.C.-750 A.D.) found on his Northwest Indiana farm. That November Jack presented an exhibit of those artifacts in the School of Law with a lecture by Nesius on the subject.

In 1976, Jack was appointed chair of what became the Museum Council, and held that position until he and I retired to emeritus status in the spring of 1996. That spring also marked the end of the inaugural year of the new VU Center for the Arts (VACA) Museum, a facility for which we had worked so hard for so many years. Jack was instrumental in that achievement. He had great skills in leading the Council to decisions by consensus; in reassuring and encouraging me (his gracefully worded, wholehearted letters of support in the files still warm my heart); and in participating with me on art trips and on Museum projects. Before the new Museum facility existed the Council often met in the museum office-storeroom in the lower level of the old Moellering Library. Jack liked that space for the retreat among artworks it provided.

To extend the educational reach of the collection, in the late spring and summer of 1978 Jack brought to the office-storeroom his large-format Speed Graphic view camera with its expanding bellows for us to photograph in color, art from the collection to reproduce on postcards and notecards. There was no budget for a photographer. Jack and I were determined. Together we also assembled a tripod, 4 x 5 film holders, light-safe film loading bag, black viewing cape, color chart, filters, light meter, etc., etc. We improvised lighting. He calculated the adjustment in exposure for the filters. We photographed—again and again—till we eliminated glare, got everything in focus, and could accept the color

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balance. When the director of the University of Nebraska Sheldon Museum of Art saw from one of our cards that we had a Georgia O'Keeffe painting, he promptly borrowed it for his 1980 O'Keeffe show. Its catalog circulated and our O'Keeffe soon was in demand for museum exhibits around the country.

Jack was attentive to the rights of artists. Reproduction rights, he stressed, didn't necessarily come with artwork ownership. Where appropriate, he insisted on getting written permission from an artist and giving compensation. In 1985, Jack took the lead in getting the Museum Council to recommend unanimously that the University Board of Directors confer an honorary Doctor of Arts degree on the seventy-two-year-old Tokyo artist Sadao Watanabe, for his life's work of creating biblical stencil prints. The Board did so in July of 1987.

In August of 1987, the atrium of the new School of Law building (Wesemann Hall on Greenwich Street) became for Jack and me a gallery in which to exhibit "Etchings of the Arab World" by Jack's friend, London artist Rosalind Whitman. From 1987 till the end of the inaugural year of the VUCA Museum facility in spring 1996, the Museum had mounted, with Jack's help, encouragement, and approval, at least twenty-seven exhibitions of art in the School of Law atrium, now named for two of the university's chief patrons of the arts, Richard and Phyllis Dusenberg.

In honor of my retirement, Jack participated in creating the Brauer Endowment for Museum Programming. This huge effort was sponsored by Friends of Art, a group that provides support for the Museum. Jack sat on its board, and he was an endowment campaign planner, visitor, and generous donor. In those and subsequent years, he donated over twenty works of art to the Museum, a number of them beautiful craft works in silver and glass by artist-craftsmen he knew personally. With such gifts he helped both the artist and the Museum.

Another way Jack supported the arts was by encouraging the careers of promising persons in art administration. For example, Jack mentored Ruth Crnkovich, who served with Friends of Art, and encouraged her to get the training that would enable her to play a role commensurate with her abilities. With his support, Ruth's career as a curator, exhibit director, and art appraiser has blossomed. Jack recognized talent when he saw it and expected excellence when he met someone who was capable of achieving it.

In the early years of his retirement Jack established Chimney Hill Press, a small poetry press to publish books of poetry by "deserving poets," such as nationally known local poets Bernhard Hillila, Edward Byrne, and Jill *Pelez* Baumgaertner. For the book covers, he sometimes

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reproduced art from the collection of the Brauer Museum, thus deftly promoting both the Museum and the poets.

Jack's passing makes me increasingly realize and sadly miss his uniquely human ways. He carried cash, not credit cards. He didn't have a computer or a microwave. For years, I couldn't get him to leave messages on my phone's voicemail because it was a principle of his not "to talk to a machine." The one exception seems to have been his Williams and Sonoma Bread Machine, which enabled him to churn out loaf after loaf in all sorts of interesting varieties. My wife Ellen and I were regular beneficiaries of this tilt toward modernity, a machine that kneaded the dough, timed its rise and fall, baked a loaf, and then shut itself off automatically. I also remember his reaction when I insisted on adding peanut butter and jelly to the subtle flavors of his gourmet bread. "Yeesh, Richard, peanut butter and jelly on onion and dill sourdough?"

More importantly, I also gratefully remember how he patiently and wisely edited drafts of a brief Museum history I was writing. Once when I was sick, he made a wren house and hung it on the branch of the tree outside our dining room windows, along with a bird feeder, so that I would never be short of visitors. Just before he died last Thanksgiving, he bought one of my paintings—a cross—to give to his Christian caregiver. To the end, Jack Hiller was an advocate with a heart.