

# Editorial Commentary - continued

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have been acquired after 2006 and only three since 2019. Some years in that time span no works were added to the Collection. But I hope those works make it on to the list on the Commission's website soon. They have had over a dozen years to update the list.

While looking for info on the State Collection I learned for the first time about the Nina Liu Fund, a fund set up by two anonymous donors in 2019 to honor my old conversation friend and gallery owner in downtown Charleston, SC, to help add works and maintain the State Collection. Something to enhance the support the SC Arts Foundation gives to the State Art Collection.

Don't ask me to explain who or what the SC Arts Foundation is. The best I can make out is they and the SC Arts Commission are the same - they are in the same building, have the same phone number and a staff member of the Commission answers that phone if you call the Foundation (most likely you'll get an answering machine). But, they say they are different. You figure it out. Some say it's the Commission's slush fund, to do things the state government wouldn't allow them to do, but I just don't see that much separation between the two. And a slush fund would imply there is money slouching around, but I doubt that's the case.

I'm getting distracted from my real point here, the exhibit being presented at the Greenville Center for Creative Arts. It's easy to get distracted when dealing with the subject of the SC Arts Commission - there are so many unanswered questions. And, believe me, when asking them questions you have to cover all the bases, as they will never volunteer any info without you asking first, even when they know what you are trying to find out.

When it comes to this exhibit, what interested me the most is what's not said about it or offered, like how many works out of the 466 works in that Collection are in it and who the artists are being featured. This isn't the first time this exhibit has been presented in SC, but there is little info about it on the Arts Commission's website or in a search done on Google. Why is that?

In my world and the world of many people these days with the Pandemic and all, we live by what's in a press release or article written about an exhibit and sometimes photos offered. All we can give our readers is what we get in a press release. Sometimes what's not there can be enhanced by offering a link to some online info - in this case the press release mentioned a virtual tour of the exhibit would be offered sometime after the exhibit opened for those who at this time would not or could not travel to see this exhibition. You can view this virtual tour at (<https://www.artcentergreenville.org/scac-virtual>). But you're not going to learn much there. Sure, you'll see a few 360 degree images of the exhibit and can watch an almost 8 minute video of the exhibit, but no commentary is offered or text to go with the video to tell you what you're looking at or who the artists are who created these works. I can identify a few works with my 34 years of experience, but just a few. You can read an essay written by Eleanor Heartney, the curator of this exhibit, which was written some years ago when the Arts Commission started its "Art In Sight" program started in 2009, yet I saw works in the virtual tour that were purchased just a few years ago. So there might have been works added after her essay was written, which would seem strange. So, you might say that, *Contemporary Conversations*, has been recycled over the last ten years.

It's a pretty lazy effort on both the Greenville Center for Creative Arts and the SC Arts Commission in presenting this show of some select works from the State Art Collection - even if it is an old recycled exhibit. I'll let the folks in Greenville off the hook some, as I know how hard it is for any non-profit in SC to question the Arts Commission and not see their funding

reduced or outright cut in the future. That's the way they roll in South Carolina - to get along, just go along - don't ask too many questions or soon you'll be on the outside looking in.

For me, I don't have to put up with just getting along with the Arts Commission and not questioning what they have done and don't do. And, in my humble opinion the State Art Collection is a mess and doesn't represent much but artists who were in the good graces of the Arts Commission at some point or knew someone powerful enough to get them in it.

You've heard of one hit wonders in the music industry - groups who had a one hit single and then you never heard from them again, well the State Art Collection is full of them. Works by artists just passing through South Carolina, works by artists you've never heard of and never will other than reading the list of artists in the State Art Collection. And, there are some there that have no business being there. Again, that's my opinion, you go look and judge for yourself.

I've been doing an arts publication about the visual arts in South Carolina for more than 34 years. I don't know everything or every artists in that community, but I've followed the exhibition activity going on in SC and a lot of these artists in the Collection haven't been included in many of those exhibitions, unless they were presented by the Arts Commission, if even then.

Don't get me wrong, the bulk of the Collection is filled with works by artists who should be there, but many might be represented by one single work in their 40 or 50 year career working in South Carolina. And, there are a lot of artists who have been working in South Carolina 40 or 50 years and have no works in the Collection - these are the artists the people of SC love, but they don't seem to cut the mustard with the Arts Commission - especially if you sell a lot of your work. For example, you ever hear of the Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Award? The Arts Commission now likes to call this award the Governor's Award. The State Art Collection doesn't have any works by Elizabeth O'Neill Verner in it (at least I didn't see any listed), yet they used her name to put on the state's highest art award an artist can be given in SC. But Verner's work was not good enough to be in the collection? The Arts Commission might argue that you can go to an art museum to see her works. So is the State Collection for those who can't make it in art museums? It doesn't make sense.

Now I could provide you with a list of long time SC artists who I'm shocked that their work is not in the Collection, but that would be embarrassing to them - it's the same reason I won't mention those who are in it and I can't figure out why they are.

The Arts Commission likes to say that the State Collection belongs to the people of SC, but does it? If you can't see it when you want, how can it be yours? And, if it includes works by artists those same people of SC have never heard of, yet artists they do know and like are not - how much is it their Collection? And, don't get me wrong I don't want to see the Collection be a People's Choice Collection - that really would be a mess, but I would like to see one that doesn't exclude artists who happen to be lucky enough to sell their work.

I also think the State Collection should be at the SC State Museum and on display in a special gallery space on a rotating basis so we can see it all - not in some agency head's office or a few government buildings you will never visit.

Here's a list of buildings in Columbia, Charleston or Bluffton where you might come in contact with a work from "your" State Art Collection:

South Carolina Arts Commission (1026 Sumter St., Suite 200, Columbia)

Administrative Law Court (Edgar A. Brown Building, 1205 Pendleton St., Columbia)

Division of Technology Operations Data Center (4430 Broad River Rd., Columbia)

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## WELLS GALLERY



RUSSELL GORDON, *BLUE JAY IN SNOWY BITTERSWEET*, 19x15, OIL

THE SANCTUARY AT KIAWAH ISLAND GOLF RESORT

1 SANCTUARY BEACH DR | KIAWAH, SC | 29455 | 843.576.1290

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