People of the Eye

CAA Treasurer John Hylant recently spoke with this former professor Lane Fulton, professor emeritus at Williams College and eleventh president of CAA (1982-83).

The metallic red, two-year-old Taurus pulled into the parking lot slowly and stopped. After a brief delay, the door at the driver's side swung open, and I saw a face twist avaricious and look in the back of the car. With some difficulty the body followed the face and Lane Fulton stepped out.

"Oh," he said spotting me. "I see it must be Clark Art Institute meeting time. I'm just dropping off a letter I wrote this morning. They—or you—they seem to be planning to change an admission fee at the Clark. I attended the open meeting yesterday and heard some very good ideas, so I wanted Conforti to have my thoughts."

Though he was planning to drop the letter off with Director Michael Conforti's assistant, Lane had carefully placed a new holographic stamp on the envelope. "Well," he replied when he saw me looking at the stamp, "maybe they can save some money by reusing the stamps." Then he smiled good-naturedly. "I broke in on his train of thought."

I'd be interested in hearing your recollections about the College Art Association." Lane's right eyebrow rose, and he tipped his head back slightly to look at me.

"CAA? Why I haven't been to one of their meetings for years. But, I've got fifteen minutes until friends must see me here to go to lunch. Grab that bench and I'll tell you what I remember. Let's see, I retired in 1985 from teaching at Williams and I think the last CAA board meeting I attended was in March of 1986."

A limited number of limited-edition, relief-lithography constructions by Sam Gilliam, are still available. Proceeds benefit CAA's Professional Development Program for Artists and Art Historians. $1,000; $1,750 for nonmembers. Contact: Kate Holland, 212/561-1051, ext. 206; khal@collegeart.org.

Annual Conference 2000, New York: Date Change

The dates for the 88th Annual Conference, to be held in New York in February 2000, have been changed. The new dates are February 23-26, 2000. Please make a note of the change on your calendar!
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attended must have been 1965 or so. That's more than thirty years ago, you know."

"I understand, but I'd like some of the history of your involvement that must go back much further. When did you first join?"

Patterson was quiet for a moment, thinking of events long since past. "Oh, let me see. I was a graduate student at Princeton for two years beginning in the fall of 1930. I wrote a paper for Charles Money on a Gothic processionnal cross in the Vatican that was published under his (and my) name in the Art Bulletin. Because of this article, I joined CAA at the annual conference. And, by the way, the organization was mostly art historians and only a few artists. I was a member from then on."

"So you were twenty-three when you joined? You probably weren't an icon yet."

"I was," Lane said. "You must be joking. These were plenty of icons around, and I liked meeting these art history 'greats,' but I certainly wasn't one myself. The only reason people listen to me now is that I'm so damned old."

"I was over to miss your ninetieth birthday celebration a few months ago. That was a wonderful article on the celebration in the New York Times."

"Yes, what did I tell you? You have ninety and people listen to you and make a fuss over you."

"Going back to your history with CAA, you said you were at Princeton, but I thought you had gone to Harvard."

"I was at Harvard for six years, earning my M.A. I took a remarkable course under Arthur Pope, in which we spent some class sessions learning by making value charts, color wheels, and I remember specifically, copying a Botticelli line drawing. I used more eraser than pencil. But that was one of my first exposures to the complexity of teaching art rather than studying it. I was fascinated, but I found Harvard a bit 'chilly' and decided to work on my Ph.D. at Princeton. I had met Professor Frank Mutter from Princeton at a Williams College commencement (he was class of 1889, and I was class of 1929). When I told him I was about to go to Harvard, he said 'Fine, Harvard is a good place, but you'll be welcome if you ever want to switch to Princeton."

"So I spent two years in Princeton's Master of Fine Arts program. It was a peculiar M.F.A. in art history at the time, which would lead to a Ph.D. If I eventually produced a big fat book. In a few years, however, Princeton endangered their program to more general practice, and the M.F.A. applied only for painting and studio art. They reinstated the art history Ph.D., and I was stranded. For the rest of my life I've had to explain why I don't have a Ph.D."

"Returning to CAA, I gather you became president in 1952."

Lane Patterson at his ninetieth birthday fête hosted by Williams College, October 1987

PHOTO: MICHAEL WITTMAN
"That's right, I was elected on January 26, 1952, and served for three years. CAA was a lot smaller in those days."

"I know," I replied. "I checked the records. As you were elected president, the membership had just passed 2,000 and the total budget for the year was $20,000. I did notice that you began holding Executive Committee meetings in Williamsport."

"Well, why not? I was president, wasn't I?"

"What did you consider was the issue facing CAA that you cared most about?"

On this point Lane responded quickly and with no hesitation. "I believed that the practicing artists were underrepresented both at CAA and elsewhere and that there should be a balance of artists and art historians both on the board and in the membership."

"How did you get this to happen?"

"Well, Lloyd Goodrich of the Whitney Museum and formerly a CAA director wrote a letter to the board urging inclusion of 'artists or artist-teachers' as members of the CAA Board of Directors. We gave the proposal very serious consideration, and it was adopted by the board in January 1953. But the real impetus came the following year when I uninstalled my successor . . . the successor from Georgia . . . Lane paused. "It's a problem of age. His name is not coming to me."

"It has nothing to do with age; it happens to me all the time. Was he a real scholar?"

"Oh, no. That was my private nickname for him. He looked like a Southern senator. Dodd, that is, I remember now, Lamar Dodd, dean of the Art Department at the University of Georgia. Lamar was a painter and a real enthusiast for having artists represented among the CAA board and membership. He really took the ball and ran with it. Now you have plenty of artists in the CAA and on the board. I hear some say you may have too many."

Anyway, we were more successful in attracting artists than our wildest expectations."

"Did you ever paint or sculpt yourself?"

"No, but I have been fascinated by the creation of art, even if I could not do it myself. I think that's why I left so strongly that educational institutions and associations like CAA should promote and be receptive to the creative artist. My appreciation for artists was brought home to me when I was teaching at Yale (1952-56). Elliott O'Hara, who was renowned for his technical skills in watercolor, took a group of us on an outing near the art building and gave us five minutes to mix paints and five minutes to paint a picture. That was an intense five minutes. I can tell you. We were later asked to spend one and a half hours in the studio doing the same picture, using every effort to make it perfect and not being under the pressure of time. Either, I was amazed that every one of us had done a better job in our quick response to the subject than we had done with all the time in the world to paint. I learned then that I was not an artist."

As I listened to Faisman's words, the years seemed to drop magically away. I could remember him standing by a stand, at the front of the lecture hall. He wore a bow tie slightly askew, and there were chalk marks on the sleeve of his jacket. When the room lights were on, I could see his blue eyes. Most of the time, however, the room was darkened except for the blast of white light, conveying a sense of some work of art. Each piece of art was isolated with Lane's enthusiastic and insistent comments. Not one of us who had the privilege—and we knew it was a privilege—to take his famous course left the room without carrying his buoyant and obvious love of painting with us. And what we learned we always remembered.

I said, "Going back to your comment a few moments ago that artists were underrepresented by CAA and elsewhere. What did you mean by 'elsewhere'?"

"Harvard," he replied. "Some time late in 1952, I was contacted by John Nicholas Brown, who was on Harvard's Board of Overseers and had a special interest in art history. He was not happy with the overly academic direction that fine arts at Harvard was headed in, especially among the art historians at the Fogg Museum. He had been named chairman of a committee to reevaluate the fine arts programs at Harvard and asked me if I could get a leave of absence for a year from Williams to be the executive secretary of his committee."

"Excuse me for asking, but why would Brown have asked you to undertake this job with him?"

"Well, we first met in London. I had arrived on June 1, 1945, just as the war ended. I was a part of the OSS, a small three-man group called the Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU). We were charged with finding out what Hitler, Goering, and Gobbiels, among others, had done with the art that they had stolen. We interviewed anyone we could find, and we studied whatever documentation we could get our hands on. It was in London that I was introduced to Brown, who was a part of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives outfit. It also had an art history, the MFA A, but, in short, they were called the Venal MFA. Their job was to scour Western Europe, find the great works of art, and make certain they were as safe as possible in the chaos following the war."

I remember that John had a snappy officer's uniform and maybe even a star on his shoulder. Brown and I had some good conversations on a number of subjects. I found him a very pleasant, intelligent, and well-informed person. On the importance of artists we shared some common views about the art department at Harvard. That's why I think he enlisted me about his fine arts review committee."

"So you were called by Brown about the same time you were promoting artists at the CAA?"

"Same issue, in a way. I found the art historians at Harvard (at the Fogg) were closed-minded about the importance of artists, painters, sculptors, what have you. I received a year's leave of absence from Williams and spent that year investigating and preparing the committee's report. We found, for example, that the only space Harvard allocated for one course on painting was one room on the third floor at the back of the Fogg. There was one young instructor and, as I remember, about ten students. We felt that this had to be changed, just as change was necessary for CAA."

"During the twelve months I was at Harvard (1954-55), I organized, took notes when the committee met, interviewed faculty, and when we were finished, I wrote the draft of the committee report, which was then taken apart by the members of the committee prior to finalizing it. I think the final title of the report as it was published in 1956."

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was 'Fine Arts at Harvard.'

"The key recommendation, at least in my judgment, was that a facility for

teaching painting and sculpture should be built and it should be contiguous to

the Foggy Stairs. Brown agreed whole-

heartedly that we needed a studio arts

emphasis and facility. We even included

a picture in the report of a joint treaty

between the two buildings so that studio

artists and art historians would inter-

singe. The enemy, we believed, was

the whole gang of art historians who

were in love with words rather than

objects. I felt we needed what I liked to

call 'people of the eye' instead of just

'people of the mind.' So, the report

nicely bound and with our recommen-
dation, went to Nathan Pusey, President

of Harvard, and from him to the art

world at large.

"No sooner had the report reached

the hands of Harvard alumni than

Pusey received a telephone call from a

man named Carpenter from St. Louis.

As I recall it, he said, 'I haven't seen fit
to do much for Harvard as of yet, but I

liked that fine arts report, and, if you

would be willing, I'll give the funds to

build the facility recommended.'

"Pusey was more than pleasantly

surprised and was about to accept the

proposal when Carpenter interjected.

'But you'll have to agree to one condi-
tion that I put on my gift. I choose the

architect.'

"Pusey was immediately concerned

that Carpenter's choice of architect

would not be acceptable to the Board of

Overseers. So he asked Carpenter if he

had a candidate for the job.

"'Yes, I do,' he said. 'Le Corbusier.'

"'So?' said Pusey with a twinkle in

his eye, "our proposal to elevate studio

art at Harvard not only got accepted, it

wound up getting Harvard the only

Le Corbusier building in the United

States.'

"I would say that you were

extremely busy promoting the cause of

artists at a critical time," I suggested.

He only smiled and said, "You do what

you can."

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Correction

The bio of 2006 annual conference theme
chair Ellen Levy, which appeared in the
"Annual Conference 2006: Call for

Session Proposals" (May CAA News,

page 4-6), should read: "An guest editor of

Contemporary Art and the Genetic Code

(Levy with Berta M. Sichel, Art Journal,

Spring 1996), Levy fostered an interdis-

ciplinary dialogue."