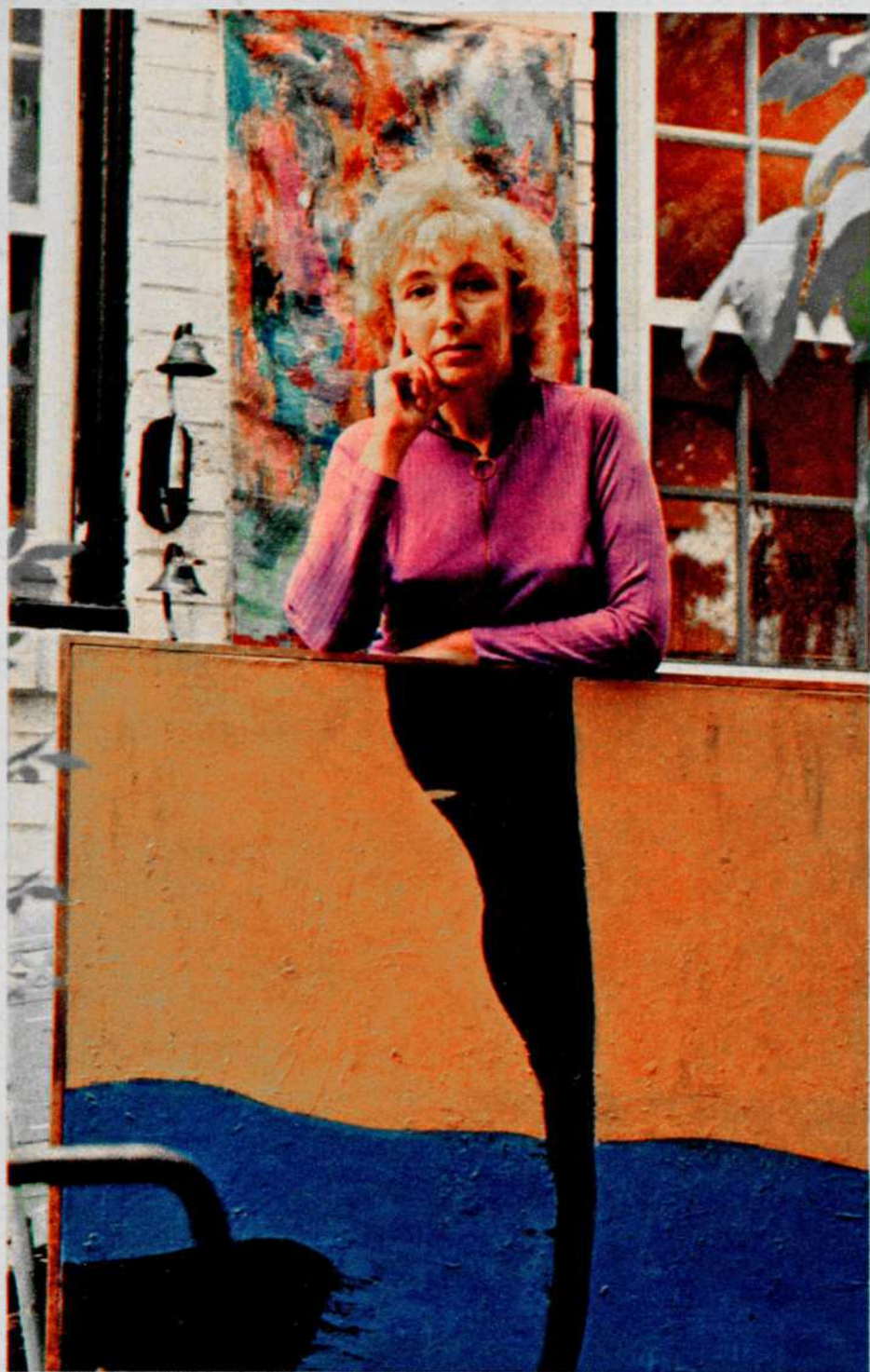


Sculptor Joe Greenberg: "Art collectors have no need or desire to stay in town to look around. They just head for New York."

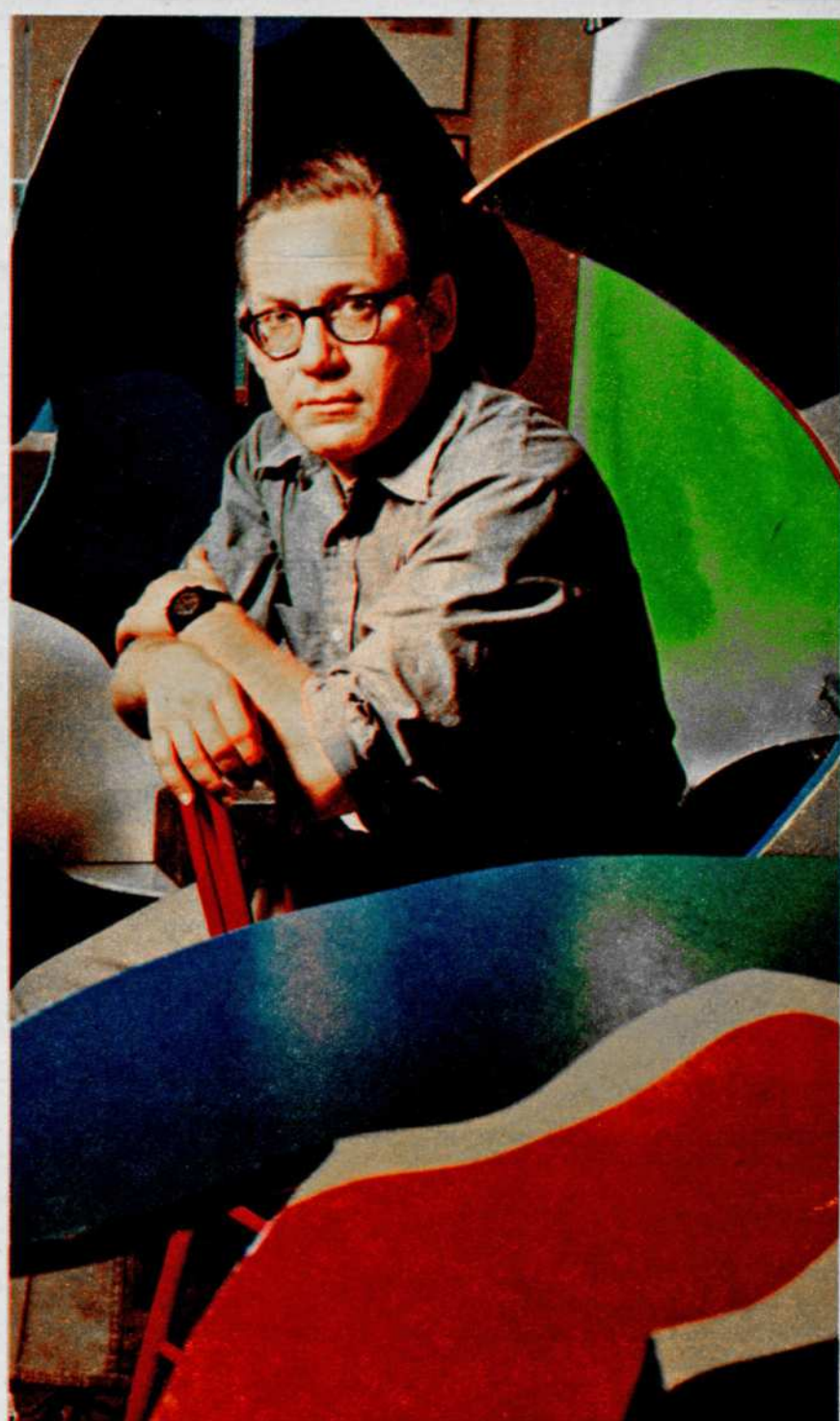
Does Philadelphia Give the Brush-Off to Local Artists?

The famed Thomas Eakins couldn't earn a living or a reputation here, and the city's top painters and sculptors claim nothing has changed since his time.

Photos And Text By HOAG LEVINS



Painter Libby Newman was a major force behind the current AEA exhibition.



Sam Maitin: "There is little (official) respect for art or artists from this city."

Perhaps the best way to set the mood of this piece is to point out that Philadelphia is a city where a garbageman can routinely make \$10,000 a year, but a bona fide, full-time fine artist is lucky to clear \$3,000—hardly a living wage.

Philadelphia, which has wangled itself the reputation of being a dismal town for entertainment, sports teams, and politicians, has fared equally as well when it comes to areas of culture such as the fine arts. There are, in the area, thousands of painters and sculptors. Of those, the truly gifted number into the hundreds. Unfortunately, as few as five fine artists in the city are able to make their living solely through sales of their art.

Call it horrible karma or bad vibes or whatever, but Philadelphia seems to be afflicted with an unspeakable curse when it comes to the appreciation and development of cultural phenomena.

For major art collectors, Philadelphia is either a dirty word, or simply a bit of bad scenery along the New York-to-Washington Metroliner route. Few ever get off the train to investigate further, let alone to buy works of local artists.

In addition, Philadelphians who have the money and inclination to buy art, generally take both to New York for their shopping. It's not at all unusual for a local art collector to travel to New York to purchase the work of a Philadelphia artist on display there. The same collector would never think of buying the same piece of work for half the price back home in Philly. That's not the way things are done.

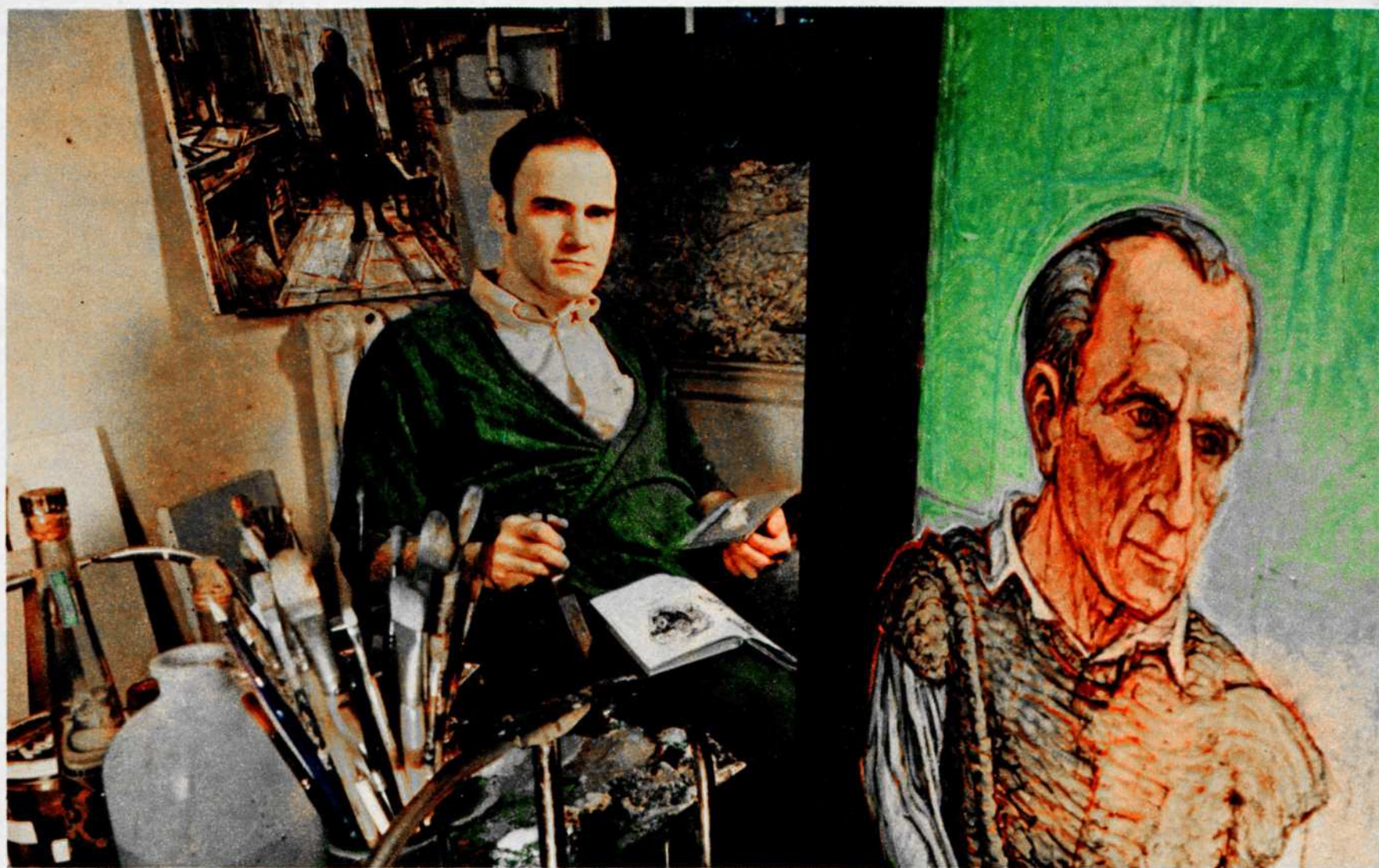
It's not that Philadelphia artists are bad, mind you. They're very good and are selling in New York and other major art centers. Their only handicap is that they are *from* Philadelphia. Many artists who elect to stay in town often claim to be from somewhere else. It gives them

a better chance of selling their paintings or sculpture in the out-of-town galleries.

"Philadelphia art collectors are afraid of themselves. They don't trust their taste. They want a New York stamp of approval on whatever they buy. That way, no matter what they buy, they can still claim 'it came from New York' no matter how bad it is," said Mrs. Libby Newman flatly. Middle-aged and the former head of the Artists Equity Association in the city, the painter has long suffered from the local market drought. Twelve years ago, she and another artist, Mrs. Laura Goodman, opened a gallery in the city and closed it down within two years as a flop.

"People simply would not buy in Philadelphia. Back then, we had brought in some Picassos and other name artists who are today some of the very top names. Even their work would not move in this city. The situation has gotten a

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Though he's had several one-man shows, artist Bob McGovern relies on his Philadelphia College of Art teaching job to support his family.

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little better now, but not a whole lot.

"Traditionally, this town has been conservative. People who buy art want to be 'safe,' so they buy from New York. At the same time the city has never shown an overabundance of respect for art. The same city that can find \$50 million for a stadium at the same time can't find enough to keep all the wings of the Art Museum open. That's sad commentary."

Mrs. Newman is one of 225 area artists who are members of Artists Equity, which is trying to give the local art scene a much-needed boost with a four-week show at the Civic Center Museum, 34th st. and Civic Center blvd.

That show, which began October 29th and will continue until the 28th of this month, is a traditional event that has taken on a new look this year. Geared toward involving larger masses of the general population in the arts, the show is aimed at breaking through the "look-but-don't-touch" essence of most previous art shows.

Each Sunday during the four-week event, dozens of workshops and demonstrations are being held in fields ranging from film-making to sculpture to Chinese brush painting.

The AEA is also using the show to push its efforts at getting people with financial means to purchase art for donation to public institutions in the city so that the work of local artists might be readily available for public viewing. This would also help insure that the works of top

Philadelphia artists will remain here in the city where they have worked, rather than winding up in New York or elsewhere.

"It has never been done like this before . . . in such a planned, all-out effort," said Marty Zipin, president of the AEA. "We're trying to wake Philadelphia up to its own potential. We're trying to say with this museum full of art, 'Look, collectors, you don't have to go to New York. Just look at what is being done in this city.'"

Things have been in happening in Philadelphia in the way of great art for a long time. Some of the greatest talents in the world began their work in Philadelphia but, after being ignored here, have been forced to either physically leave or spiritually disown their hometown.

This year's AEA show is dedicated to Wharton Esherick, wood carver and sculptor of world-renown who was virtually unheard of in Philadelphia. At the time of his death a year and a half ago, the Paoli artist's work had for decades been on display in some of the most prestigious museums and collections of the world. Nationally, he was a "name" artist in every sense of the word; locally—except in the minds of fellow artists—he was a nobody.

He is just one of a broad cadre of artists—including some greats of the contemporary world—who gave up even trying in this town and went elsewhere to be "discovered."

Andy Warhol, pop artist; Franz Kline, leader

of the abstract expressionist movement; sculptor Alexander Calder, whose grandfather designed much of City Hall's sculpture and whose father designed the Logan Square fountain. (He left town in disgust when he was unable to get work. Calder now enjoys a world reputation and lives in France and Connecticut.)

The list goes on and on, painters, sculptors, photographers and others. The classic case of Philadelphia's disregard for its artists is that of Thomas Eakins, now hailed as one of the greatest painters of all time. (Thomas Jefferson Hospital in Philadelphia recently turned down an offer of \$1.5 million for his large oil painting, "The Gross Clinic," which depicts doctors performing an early operation.)

Eakins, who died in 1916, was born in Philadelphia, where he spent his entire life. A graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, he also studied at Jefferson Medical College, and went on to paint the human body in anatomical detail rarely seen before.

Spending most of his life in a house at 1729 Mount Vernon st., he painted well over 500 pictures of Philadelphia scenes while being scoffed at continually by the local "elite" art circles.

In his entire life, Eakins made less than \$10,000 from his work.

Fifteen years after his death, collectors from other parts of the country began to realize what a vast treasure had been left in the house on Mt. Vernon st.—where the frustrated artist stored

"Living in Philadelphia can drain an artist. At the same time, I can't see going to New York; that's a circus."

most of his unsold paintings and where they remained, collecting dust, long after his death.

Philadelphia awoke to the greatness of Eakins only when confronted with the fact—decades late—by the rest of the world. Many of Eakins' paintings which he gave away just to have someone hang them now sell for as much as a quarter of a million dollars each. They are judged to be some of the greatest works of art ever produced.

"There is little respect for art or artists from this city. Officially, the city couldn't care less," Sam Maitin scowled across the tunafish salad on whole wheat which was poised in front of his face. He went on to gobble down some raw vegetables in the kitchen atop his studio at 704 Pine st. The 42-year-old painter is one of a handful of artists in the Philadelphia area who successfully support themselves with their art. Maitin's paintings and prints sell very well in New York, Houston, Los Angeles, Tokyo, London and other major cities. He has enjoyed one-man shows around this country as well as in Europe and the Orient. He sells very little in Philadelphia.

"Other cities have a different atmosphere about them. For instance, Boston, where the Mayor accepts and promotes art as a normal part of the fabric of urban life. Or take New York, where not long ago, the Fire Board began citing many of the city's artists' lofts for fire hazards, and artists threatened to leave the city. Mayor (John) Lindsay took action. He couldn't permit that to happen. He knew the value of artists to a city."

"Lindsay appreciates what artists and their work lend to a city . . . think a minute . . . can you imagine Mayor Tate earing whether artists moved in or out, or lived or died?"

Laura Goodman, sculptress, was sitting next to a bronze statue of a small child jumping rope, which is one of her pieces on exhibit at the AEA show. She had sad eyes and a glum face and spoke of the local art scene with a limp wave of the hand.

"No one cares in Philadelphia. That's the problem all wrapped up. No one cares at all."

Mrs. Goodman, mother of three whose works are represented in collections throughout the U. S. and Europe, has spent all her life here.

"I won't say much about it. I don't need to sell my work. I create what I feel. I'm not interested in making a living at it or being a world star," Mrs. Goodman said.

"Living in Philadelphia can drain an artist. At the same time, I can't see going to New York. That's a circus up there. It's all Madison Avenue. They sell art just the same way they sell cereal or hand soap. I don't want any part of it."

Ironically, for all the problems that Philadelphia presents to established artists, the city is known far and wide as one of the art educational centers. No other city can boast five art schools of the caliber found in the city. They include the Philadelphia College of Art, the Moore College of Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the University of Pennsylvania's Fine Arts

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Sculptress Laura Goodman: "No one cares in Philadelphia. That's the problem all wrapped up."

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Fine Arts; and for changing exhibitions of a contemporary nature there's the Art Alliance. Artists Equity should keep this in mind."

Turner went on to say that at least eight percent of the funds allotted for acquisition in the past few years have been spent to obtain local artwork. "It must be understood that we're dealing with the whole history of Western art in this museum and eight percent is a very high percentage for local contemporary artists when you consider that.

"We want to do what we can to help Philadelphia, but we don't want a double standard when it comes to judging Philadelphia artists. We should look at what's done here just as we look at what's done throughout America. There should be no special consideration. That's the greatest good we can do Philadelphia's artists."

"I don't want to throw stones at the president of the museum," said George Bunker, dean of faculty at the Philadelphia College of Art, "but I think the museum has the reputation for being able to get up large sums to pay for well-known works when it needs to, but can't get up even a quarter of that to purchase Philadelphia art."

Bunker, 48 and a painter himself, as well as a well-traveled veteran of the national art scene, feels there may be some good things in the future for Philadelphia artists. Many of his students from PCA are beginning to congregate in sections of the city such as Pine st. near Broad.

The students in the last year or so have begun staying around after their graduation rather than moving out immediately, as was often the case in the past. He points out that at the same time, there is a little bit of encouraging activity going on in some of the city's galleries.

Bunker feels the Art Museum could be a potent force in pumping more vitality into Philadelphia's sagging art community.

"I think the Museum could exert an influence. They could run regional shows and encourage competition for one-man shows, or set aside a gallery for an Accord to Philadelphia

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Department and the Tyler School of Art at Temple University.

"That's what is so maddening," said Bob McGovern with a frustrated shake of his head. "As a city, we don't take second place to any other in the country as far as schools go. We have the very best.

"We have a variety and style that outdoes any other city. There is a treasure chest of young talent in this city but what happens to them? We graduate them and then offer them nothing. Very few stay. They can't. They have to eat like anyone else.

"What is difficult to understand is why collectors don't rush here, knowing what a reservoir of talent we have in the schools."

The 38-year-old McGovern has been painting, sculpting and printmaking since his childhood. His work, much of it religiously oriented, can be found in collections across the country. He has had several one-man shows of his prints and paintings.

In order to pay the rent and feed his wife and three children, McGovern teaches at the Philadelphia College of Art.

"Being an artist in Philadelphia is a very poetic and hazardous existence," he explained. "Artists in this city lead a second-class life, but are expected to come up to first-class responsibilities. A truck driver or electrician makes much more money at his trade, but isn't expected to bear anywhere near the same social obligations as we are.

"We're supposed to be among the most politically aware and we are the first to hear from charitable organizations soliciting funds. We are the ones who are always being asked to give lectures for free. I don't mind, it's just that the people aren't aware of what being an artist is like. It's a meager existence."

If any one thing must be singled out as a major contributor to Philadelphia's poor art reputation, it would probably be the New Jersey Turnpike. The road, which has put New York City only an hour and 15 minutes away, is one of the Philadelphia artist's worst enemies.

While most other cities have been gently forced to look inward for art work, Philadelphia has been developed as a shadow of easily accessible New York, which, since World War II, has become the art center.

"Art collectors have no need or desire to stay here in town to look around," said Joe Greenberg. "They just hop a train or jump in their car and head for New York."

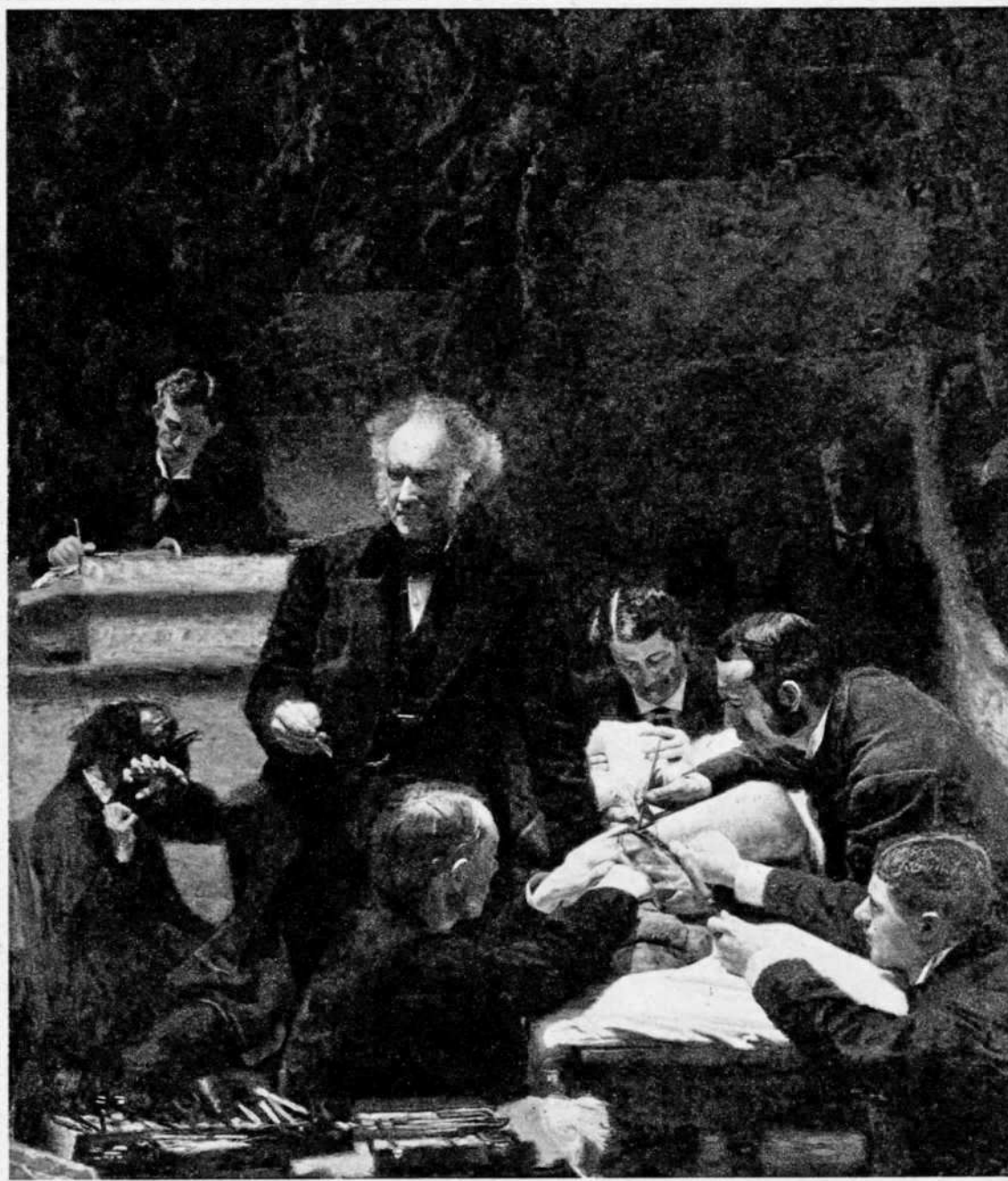
Like many other serious artists in the city, Greenberg views the New York art scene with absolute disdain.

"I wouldn't move there or have any part of that whole thing in New York," said the chunky 56-year-old, who was dwarfed by the nine-foot-high metal hand which took up a good portion of his workshop at 1629 Ludlow st.

"That's what is so damned tragic. People rushing to New York, but the scene in New York isn't even art anymore. It's straight out of Madison Avenue. Straight promotion. They take anybody who can smear paint or take a whack at a piece of wood and make him a celebrity. It doesn't take talent, it just takes money and the right promoter."

The sculptor, whose full, ruddy face and gray beard make him look not unlike Ernest Hemingway, has works of wood, bronze, stone, welded

"Artists in this city lead a second-class life, but are expected to fulfill first-class responsibilities."



Though Thomas Eakins' "The Gross Clinic" is valued at more than \$1 million, he was little-known here.

metals and fiberglass widely displayed.

Some of his better-known works include a 60-foot-high steel sculpture at the Bethlehem Civic Center; the bronze fountain at the Philadelphia Civic Center; the fountain at Temple University; and the fountain at Philadelphia's City Health Center.

"There is one good thing about the suffering artists in the city," he pointed out. "They have formed a remarkable art community. The Artists Equity has one of its strongest chapters here because we have the most problems and tend to stick closer together.

"One of the biggest problems—aside from the proximity of New York City—is the Philadelphia Art Museum and the people who run it. You'll find that the same people run everything else in the city and like to keep it all very quiet and very conservative. Those people are not about to look at new things. That museum has brainwashed the public into believing that there's nothing to see in the city anyway. Which

isn't so. The museum could do a lot, but it prefers to operate almost as a private country club for the blue-bloods who partially fund it and sit on the board."

Greenberg was voicing a sentiment shared by many members of the AEA who feel that the Philadelphia Art Museum remains aloof in more ways than its physical altitude above the Schuylkill River. The AEA members' discontentment centers around what they consider to be the museum's disinterest in local artists and the fact that no section of the sprawling facility has been set aside to display works by the area's contemporary artists.

"I view this museum as only one of several institutions in the city," said Museum director Dr. Evan Turner, who does not feel the duty of his museum is to emphasize contemporary artists.

"For an institution devoted to the American Arts, there is the Pennsylvania Academy of the
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Contemporary Artists. There are many things they could do to give the kind of distinction to Philadelphians that is given to imported talent.

"There are museums which do this. At the Chicago Art Institute they do this sort of thing in a very big way, and it works. The place there is always jammed with people, and they continually have a wide variety of shows—many of them involving local artists.

"More of this kind of thing could be done here. Then the public, seeing more of the art of its own locale being dignified in the museum, would be more impressed and begin to pay attention to their own artists."

Offering a glimpse of the stirring promise of what Bunker and others believe could happen in Philadelphia is a small second-floor gallery located at 1524 Walnut st.

Opened at that location a short time ago, the Miriam Locks gallery does the preposterous thing of trying to make a profit by dealing exclusively in the work of Philadelphia artists.

Miriam Locks is a 56-year-old unshakeable optimist who dislikes the Art Museum ("It's like the Vatican . . . austere and intimidating"),

Main Line art collectors "wouldn't know a good piece of art if it bit them," says one gallery owner.

stuffy Main Line art collectors ("Wouldn't know a good piece of art if it bit them") and anyone who says that Philadelphia artists aren't as marketable as anyone else, when they're given even half a chance.

"I guess I haven't proved that yet, because I'm still not making a profit, but things are looking up," said the gray-haired gallery owner who renovated much of the gallery herself.

"First of all, you have to be a realist. There are 10,000 artists out there looking for exposure. The truth is that only a limited number are good. In any city you have artists who are complaining. It's in Philadelphia that most of them have valid complaints because even the very good ones don't have a chance. But those same good ones can make a gallery run well—they just need proper exposure and promotion."

With a stable of 15 artists, Mrs. Locks has begun to draw national attention as "the strange little gallery in Philadelphia that actually sells the work of Philadelphians," as she puts it.

"There is something happening in town," she insisted. "You have to look close, but it's there. For the first time, business people—banks, for instance—are coming to buy contemporary works rather than the stuffy murals they used to hang in their offices.

"If I succeed at this, it'll make a difference. Actually, it is making a difference already. The other galleries and some of the museums are taking a look. For the first time, I've had people from New York down here to look around. Now that is a real step forward for Philadelphia. Someone actually came into this town to look.

"I get feedback from other cities now that I'm getting publicity. There is a feeling—not a large one, but a growing one—that something may be happening in Philadelphia. There's a lot of interest out there.

"There is also more interest in town than a lot of people suspect. I deal with a new type of art buyer. Most of my customers are young—

in their 20s and 30s. They are into the hip things that are happening in the city. They not only appreciate a living artist's work, they crave it. Many come in here to buy art before they go to buy furniture for their apartments.

"While all these others are stuck away in their museums, something is changing out here in the world. There is a whole generation of new

art buyers who aren't ready to have a museum or a board of directors make a decision for them. These are the people who know what they like and who go to buy it, no matter where it comes from. These are the ones who are going to turn the art scene in Philadelphia upside-down in the coming decade. And no other city deserves it more than this one." □

**"Never saw a holiday meal yet
where the youngsters didn't
clean me out of olives.**

**So, come the holidays, I get
extra cans of Lindsay ripe
olives.**

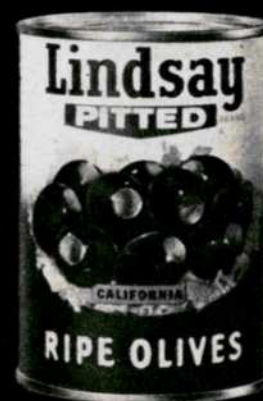
**When you live here in
Lindsay, around olives as long
as I have, you get to know
good ones.**

Lindsay olives are the best."

*Opal Griffiths, Lindsay forelady
(that's her grandson Blaine).
Lindsay, California*



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