

SPECIAL ISSUE: ART COLLECTIONS IN SCHOOLS

The School District of Philadelphia

The School District of Philadelphia's art collection is the result of city and region wide efforts guided by administrators, teachers, and art directors. The District, led by the Division of Art Education, was active in *Picture Study* and *Schoolroom Decoration*. A vital contributor to the curriculum and philosophy of the District for over half a century, the Division led efforts to obtain original works of art, install mural decorations, work with artists to have exhibitions at the schools, and borrow traveling exhibitions from local art museums and art organizations. The collection includes a large representation of noted Pennsylvania

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The Pennridge School District

The Pennridge School District collection was influenced strongly by the presence of Walter Emerson Baum on the Sellersville-Perkasie School Board for over 25 years. Collecting in what would become the district began in 1915. Baum became a member of the board of the Sellersville School District around 1919, and continued through its 1926 consolidation into the "Sell-Perk" board, of which he was Secretary until 1949.

Dr. Paul Gruber, the first Principal of Sell-Perk High School (1922- early 1940s) was also an influence in collecting. A science and math teacher, Gruber was also an amateur painter, who donated his work

to many different school collections, including Pennridge. Following his promotion to Assistant Superintendent for the County, Gruber worked with Dr. Charles Boehm and the District to facilitate continued acquisitions.

The Pennridge School District Parent Teacher Association formed in 1949 and was very involved in collecting works for the district. In 1950, a special "picture project" was instituted led by the art committee of the PTA. Works were purchased and dedicated to certain schools and students from the schools were involved in the selection process. This initiative, with a budget of approximately \$100 per year, led to the acquisition of works by George Sotter, Walter

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The School District of Philadelphia

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Impressionists, attributed largely to their early training in the Philadelphia art schools, and also to the District administration's connections with Walter Baum.

The collection includes works on paper, oil paintings, murals, stained glass, and works in the decorative arts. In 2003, approximately 1,200 works were inventoried from over 260 schools including paintings, prints, sculptures, decorative works, murals, plaster casts, panels of stained glass, and photographs from as early as the late 1800s. In addition to Pennsylvania Impressionists, the collection includes African-American artists Benjamin Britt, Samuel Joseph Brown, Allen Randall Freelon, Henry Bozeman Jones, Henry O. Tanner, Dox Thrash, and Laura Wheeler Waring, along with other noted American artists Nicola



D'Ascenzo, Paul Remmey, Albert Rosenthal, Alice Kent Stoddard, Victor Vaserely, and N.C. Wyeth, among numerous others.

The school district began collecting under William Albert Mason, Director of Drawing 1892-1923. Efforts varied among schools. Artworks were acquired to support *School-room Decoration* and *Picture Study*, in the form of gifts from alumni or graduating classes, purchases to recognize new schools or retiring administrators, funds raised by teachers and funds acquired through plays and pageants, and donations by artists. A committee on schoolroom decoration was formed in 1901, and included support from outside community members including Harrison S. Morris (Director of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts), painter William Merritt Chase, Leslie W. Miller (Professor and Principal of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art) and other well-known leading artists.

The dedication of a new building at Central High School prompted many donations, including a 1902 portrait by renowned painter Thomas Eakins (a graduate of Central) of John Seely Hart, Central's second prin-



icipal from 1842-1858. Another early acquisition was a 1890 Thomas Eakins portrait of Professor George W. Fetter, the Principal of Philadelphia High School for Girls from 1865-1894. In addition, many schools acquired murals for schoolroom decoration by significant artists such as John Sinnock and Frank Copeland. Schools that developed notable collections included Woodrow Wilson Middle School, Central High School, Girls High School, Frankford High School, and William Penn High School.

Collecting efforts increased under Theodore Milton Dillaway, Director of Fine Art 1924-1941. Dillaway, an artist himself, was a strong advocate of decoration of the school and home. His efforts to revamp the curriculum to include art appreciation, picture study, and decoration strongly influenced the district's acquisition of artworks. Charles M. Dudley, Principal of Woodrow Wilson Middle School from 1928 to

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1950, was one of the strongest leaders in the district on schoolroom decoration. The well-established collecting efforts continued through the early 1950s and 1960s under subsequent arts administrators Earl Milliette and Jack Bookbinder.

The vibrant community of artists in the Philadelphia area and elsewhere with roots in Philadelphia schools provided quality work from which to choose and constant energy for the arts, leading to the notable collection of the present day. The artworks and artists are intimately bound into the history of the school district and its teachers and administrators, as well as the art historical movement of the time.



The Pennridge School District

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Baum, Maximillian Vanka, and John Conner.

Modernist artist Joseph Meierhans, another artist well-represented in Pennridge's collection, was an advocate of educating students about local artists and collaborated with teachers in the school district. Meierhans moved to Bucks County in 1932 and lived there for over 40 years in an old Victorian home in Hagersville, which still stands today. In 1956, Meierhans converted a 200-foot chicken coop on his property into a gallery that exhibited recognized artists of the region on a regular basis. Students from the District would visit Meierhans' gallery periodically and he also served as an informal advisor to the students regarding artists for their collection. The District acquired a substantial amount of his work through donations or in honor of the opening of new schools. One of the most noted donations is an approximately nine foot long mural titled *The Hunters*, gifted to the High School in 1959.

Meierhans left Bucks County for North Carolina in 1977, but the District's collecting continued in part through the Pennridge Art Gallery. On October 15, 1978, the district held the inaugural exhibition in the gallery they had established in his honor in the former administrative

building. The exhibition included the work of Meierhans, Joanne Isaac, Raymond Barger, and George Trivellini. From this exhibit, one Barger work was obtained for the collection. The gallery was co-founded by Dr. William Keim (Superintendent 1970-1981, Principal of the High School 1958-1970) and Virginia Applebach, Department Coordinator for K-12 Art, 1946-1978. The gallery's activities were managed by art teacher and Assistant Gallery Director Deb Oltman, with a committee of artists, community members and school representatives. The gallery, which operated for 10 years, displayed works from the district's collection and highlighted area artists three to four times a year.

Souderton Area and Quakertown Community School Districts

These districts are similar in their holdings, both containing a large representation of Walter Baum's work from various time periods.

Both collections have been restored and reinstalled at the schools so that they continue to be celebrated in the districts and recognized as part of the heritage of their community.

Details regarding these collections are on page 5.

The Bucks County Traveling Art Gallery

The Bucks County Traveling Art Gallery (TAG) was a dedicated collection of art for Bucks County schools used to educate students about the artists of the region in the form of a lending library. The genesis of the program occurred in the mid-1930s. Upon the retirement of Assistant Superintendent Albert C. Rutter, the County Teachers Association purchased a painting in his honor—*Durham Hills* by Walter Baum. Rutter, coincidentally, had been Baum's teacher at Sellersville Elementary. The painting was sent on a tour of the Bucks County schools and generated popular interest and requests that led to the establishment of a "picture library" with additional borrowed paintings. The Bucks County Superintendent, Dr. Charles Boehm, became so enthusiastic about this initiative that he made a plan to secure funds for a group of paintings by the county's most famous artists.

The collection was formally dedicated on September 26, 1949, after a number of years in opera-



tion, at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope. In attendance were teachers, school directors, artists, businessmen, and professionals from all across the County. At the time of the dedication, there were 61 works in the collection. It was hoped that in future a museum would be built and that future Bucks County schools would include art galleries. The goal was to have all of the artworks rotate in small groups for specified periods so that each school in the County could experience the collection. It was also intended that TAG be a model for other communities throughout the country to develop such programs.

TAG was managed by the County Superintendent's office until the late 1960s when the county offices were merged. Management shifted to the Instructional Media Services department of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 (BCIU) until the 1980s. By then, the collection had grown to approximately 400 works. In 1983, the Program's Administrator, Shirley Douglas, reported that "it is cost prohibitive to continue to circulate the wall prints, wall paintings, and pictures" and recommended that the Board authorize her "to return permanently to the local districts the districts' choice of the wall paintings, wall prints, and photographs." By



1986, the BCIU had removed from circulation 50 of the most valuable works, but the program remained in operation.

In 1989, the BCIU identified the need to provide oversight of the collection and there were discussions of the formation of an Art Trust Board to manage this need. In the mid 1990s, BCIU Director Bill Vantine and Michener Director Bruce Katsiff collaborated to spearhead a search to find all the works in the collection left in the schools. Efforts were made to conserve the work, with State funding through Senator Joseph Conti, and revive the original mission of the collection. This was launched in 1999 with a celebratory exhibition at the Michener, *From Artist To Child*, accompanied by a pilot program, development of curriculum, and in-services for teachers. This collection continues to travel to schools in the Art on the Move outreach program, a partnership between the Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 and the James A. Michener Art Museum.

The Souderton Area School District

Souderton's collection consists of works gifted by graduating classes in the 1940s and 1950s. His level of representation demonstrates that Baum, in addition to working with school districts to promote collecting and teaching students from the community, was very active in selling his work. Souderton's collection also includes the work of H. Theodore Hallman, a 1922 graduate of the district who was a student of Baum's during his high school years. He is noted for painting the landscapes of Pennsylvania. Most of the collection currently hangs in the High School's auditorium, providing the opportunity for many members of the community to view the work during performances and events. There is one painting, done by Baum, in the school's library of Leroy Rosenberger, Principal 1948-1952, that was gifted to the school in 1952.



The Quakertown Community School District

Quakertown's collection includes eight works by Baum. Among the earliest works in the collection is *Conversation*, completed in 1925. It won a gold medal at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and was presented to the high school in 1968 in honor of a former student killed in Vietnam. In 2008, the Baum works were restored through the efforts of the Quakertown Community Education

Foundation and the school celebrated with an exhibition at the high school, in the lobby of which the collection currently hangs. Art teachers were often the leaders in collecting efforts during early part of the 20th century. In Quakertown, Sarah R. Funk, art teacher in the 1930s and 1940s, is remembered as being a significant advocate for the collection. Funk was also a trustee

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The New Hope-Solebury School District

The New Hope-Solebury School District (NHSD) is located at the heart of where the New Hope Art Colony arose at the beginning of the 20th century. Schools in the district were in close proximity to Phillips' Mill, the home and studio of William Lathrop and the center for artist gatherings beginning in the early 1900s. As the colony grew, the involvement of the district with the arts community also increased. Phillips' Mill held annual exhibitions which included many of the artists now in the NHSD collection. The schools often held events at the Mill, including dances and performances. Walter Emerson Baum also served on occasion as a judge for exhibitions at the Mill. Schools were in close proximity to artists' homes and studios in New Hope and in the vicinity, which provided opportunities for students to visit and learn about their regional artists. Art

teachers also hosted exhibitions of artists from the community at the school. Also, many artists' children went to school within the district. The local network of artists was extremely strong and with the support of key teachers and administrators, they fostered the continued growth of students' exposure to the arts and the district's acquisition of work.

In addition to what is represented in this exhibition, the collection



contains the work of Ranulph Bye, George Howard Freedley, George Nakashima, and Vernon Wood. Some of the district's teachers and administrators were present at the 1949 dedication ceremonies as Trustees for the Traveling Art Gallery.

Quakertown Community

School District

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of The Bucks County Traveling Art Gallery in 1949, and Quakertown Art Department supervisor at that time.

Murals are a notable part of Quakertown's collection. In 1936, Central School (1892-1968), the district's third schoolhouse, was renovated for a new model kindergarten classroom. Three separate works depicting nursery rhymes were commissioned for the new room and created by Eleanor Clemens Gatti as a Works Progress Administration project. *The Free Press* reported on the murals and one of the works, *Maypole* was noted by Baum to be the "most beautiful." The first grade classroom also contained a mural by Gatti from 1950 depicting classic storybook characters, as well as a fireplace decorated with Henry Mercer tiles featuring animals.



Other School Districts

This exhibition highlights just a few of the many school district art collections that developed in this region. Additional collections are known to be in Upper Perkiomen School District, Allentown School District, Parkland School District, Bethlehem Area School District, Palisades School District, Pennsbury School District, and Cheltenham School District.

Elsewhere in Pennsylvania, the Greater Latrobe School District and Pittsburgh Public Schools also have notable collections that continue to acquire work and engage their communities in arts education. Greater Latrobe School District has an outstanding collection and a robust arts education program integrated into the curriculum – an art-

work is acquired on a yearly basis for the collection voted upon by the students and the works line the halls of the schools. Student docents give tours on the collection to their classmates and visitors. Yearly galas are held to raise funds for the collection and staff and a dedicated board are in place to manage all of its activities and its care.

Other areas in the US such as in and around Chicago, New York, Boston, and California also saw a growth of collecting during the first half of the 20th century. Each has its own unique story, but all are rooted in the same reforms and philosophies in education and community connections to the artists of their regions.

Image Credits: (Page 1) Joseph Meierhans, (1890-1981), *The Farm*, c. mid-late 1950s, oil on canvas, h. 27.5 x w. 33.5 inches, Pennridge School District; (page 2) John Folinsbee, (1892-1972), *Canal Bridge*, c.1923, oil on canvas, h. 32 x w. 40 inches, The School District of Philadelphia, Copyright John F. Folinsbee Trust (Top), Henry Ossawa Tanner, (1859-1937), *A Horse and Two Dogs in a Landscape*, 1891, oil on canvas, h. 30 x w.38 inches, The School District of Philadelphia (Bottom); (page 3) Walter Baum, (1884-1956), *The Brook*, (*The Brook, Winter*), c.1930, oil on canvas, h. 32 x w. 40 inches, The School District of Philadelphia (top), Joseph Meierhans, (1890-1981), *Untitled*, c. 1942, h. 34 x w. 42.5 inches, The Pennridge School District (bottom); (page 4) Joseph Crilley (1920-2008), *The Sportsman*, n.d., h. 25 x w. 22 inches, Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 (top) , Paul Keene, (1920-2009), *Orpheus I*, 1997, h. 24 x w. 29.5 inches, Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 (bottom); (page 5) Walter Baum, *Provincetown Boats*, c. 1940s/1950s, oil on canvas, w. 16 x h.20 inches, Quakertown Community School District (bottom left), Paul Gruber, *One Room Schoolhouse*, c. 1964, oil on canvas, h. 24 x w. 30, On loan from the New Hope-Solebury School District (bottom right); (page 6) George Sotter (1879-1953), *Two Roads*, c. 1951, oil on canvas, h. 26.5 x w. 30.5 inches, Pennridge School District.

138 South Pine Street • Doylestown, PA
18901 • 215.340.9800 •
MichenerArtMuseum.org

