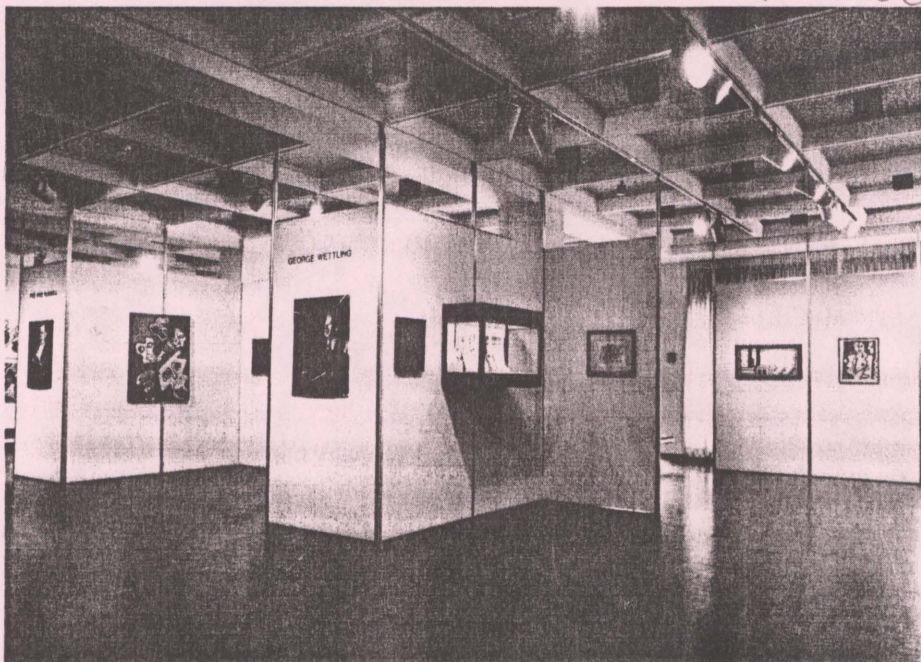




Exhibition unit at the Sordoni Art Gallery

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The Sordoni Art Gallery

by Judith O'Toole

The Sordoni Art Gallery was founded in 1973 at Wilkes College, a liberal arts institution located near downtown Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The gallery is housed in a large, classroom complex built in the early '70s, one of the few modern buildings on the campus which is situated in the center of a National Historic District.

The gallery's designers were careful to provide a modern facility with proper security and climate control systems. Loan requirements and standards from large institutions were considered so the gallery would be able to request important loans and mount significant exhibitions while providing the appropriate security and climate conditions.

The exhibition space itself is modest — about 1500 square feet. Situated between two arcades and a courtyard, it is essentially an autonomous unit within the large classroom complex. As such, it can also be secured as a separate unit. Office, reception, secure storage, and preparation space are adjacent to the gallery itself but are inadequate for the growth of the permanent collection and maintenance of the exhibition schedule. Like many other institutions, the activities of the gallery have quickly outgrown the provided space. Planners had not anticipated the amount of back-up space necessary to operate the gallery's programs. Expansion of present facilities is high on the staff's plans for the future.

Because the city of Wilkes-Barre does not have a municipal museum, the founders of the Sordoni Art Gallery anticipated that it would serve as a cultural base for the community as well as for the college. For that reason, the staff, which

consists of a Director and Assistant-to-the-Director, reports to the Vice President of Advancement rather than to the Art Department. The faculty are consulted for exhibitions and often serve as guest curators, particularly for contemporary exhibitions. In addition, the gallery mounts a biennial exhibition of faculty work.

Community input and assistance is provided by a citizen's group appointed by the president of Wilkes College. The Advisory Commission co-ordinates volunteer activities and support programs as well as providing the perspective of the community to the staff. Standing committees for this group are: Finance; Education; Acquisitions; and, Nominating. A growing Friends organization provides additional support funds and organizes bus trips and special events.

The gallery is named for the late Andrew J. Sordoni, a former State senator from Northeastern Pennsylvania and influential businessman. Sordoni was a collector of European paintings and sculpture as well as of Japanese *Inro* and *Netsuke*. A group of paintings from his collection came to the gallery as part of the initial gift. Among the artists represented are: Heinrich Burkel (German 1802-1869) Franz Moormans (Dutch 1831-1873), and Jean Georges Vibert (French 1848-1902).

The Sordoni family also created an acquisitions fund for the gallery through the sale of a portion of the Senator's collection. This fund has been designated for the purchase of American art and insures that the gallery will be able to expand its American holdings.

The gallery maintains a permanent collection of about 2000 objects which include European and American works on paper from the seventeenth century to the present; European paintings from the nineteenth century; American paintings from the nineteenth century to the present; and a small collection of American decorative arts. Currently, the focus of acquisitions is American paintings from the 1850 to 1950.

Recent additions to the permanent collection include a pair of still lifes by Severin Roesen (American, b. Germany c. 1815-d.c. 1872), one showing flowers and one fruit, c. 1865-72, both oil on panel, 12 x 16 inches. *Girl, Back to the Piano*, 1932, by John Sloan (American 1871-1951), is tempera on panel with oil varnish glazes, 20 x 24 inches. It was acquired from the exhibition, *1933 Revisited*, which was organized by the gallery in 1983. The practice of purchasing at least one work from every major show is one the gallery likes to maintain.



John Sloan (American 1871-1951) *Girl, Back to the Piano*, 1932
Tempera and glazes on panel, 20 x 24 inches 83.1
Photo by Mark Cohen

A recent purchase at auction was *Society Lady*, 1932, by George Luks (American 1867-1933), oil on canvas 43 x 33½ inches. Luks was a member of "The Eight," a group of American artists in whom the gallery has a special interest.

Among the major loan exhibitions which have been organized in-house is, *The Eight*, an exhibition of works by Robert Henri, Arthur B. Davies, William Glackens, Ernest Lawson, George Luks, Maurice Prendergast, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan. It was organized by then director, William Sterling, in 1979 and included thirty-six paintings, one of the largest exhibitions of the group since their well-known protest held at the MacBeth Gallery in 1908.

1933 Revisited: American Masters of the Early Thirties, was organized by William Sterling and Judith O'Toole in 1983 to re-create the artistic environment of the early thirties as a fiftieth anniversary celebration for Wilkes College. Artists like John Sloan and John Marin (American 1870-1953) were already "old masters" while Arshile Gorky (b. Armenia 1904-d. New York 1948) and Bradley Walker Tomlin (American 1899-1953) were young "up-and-comers." Comments from other museum personnel during the organization of the show remarked upon the unique concept of highlighting an era, with all of its factions, rather than presenting a homogeneous group of artists.

Carl Sprinchorn: Realist Impulse and Romantic Vision was organized by Judith O'Toole in 1984 and travelled to The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers and the Westmoreland County Museum of Art in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. The retrospective exhibition included fifty-eight oils and works on paper by this student of Robert Henri and friend of Marsden Hartley. The exhibition continued the gallery's interest in Henri's group while making an effort to add to the body of knowledge concerning the students of that great teacher.

Although none of Senator Sordoni's Japanese pieces came to the gallery (a significant group of these were given to Bucknell University through the Senator's position on the Board of Trustees), an exhibition was mounted in 1985 which reassembled a portion of the original collection. A guest curator, Emoretta Yang from Cornell University's Johnson Museum, was engaged to research the objects and write the catalog. As often as in-house expertise permits, the catalogs are written by gallery staff or college faculty, but the opportunity to use outside scholars is also encouraged as a way to broaden the programs and present the audiences with other points of view.

Currently being organized by the gallery is a retrospective exhibition on the work of George Benjamin Luks, a member of the Ash Can School and original member of "The Eight." An in-depth catalog containing chapters on Luks' biography, stylistic concerns, and his early work as an illustrator will accompany the exhibition which is scheduled to travel to three other sites. The details of Luks' life have been hidden by fabrication and embellishments, in part because of his own personality and penchant for storytelling. The exhibition and catalog will be the first attempt to clarify the events of his life and his place in the development of American art.

Mrs. Helen Farr Sloan, the widow of John Sloan, Luks' friend and collaborator, has been a moving force behind the exhibition as a member of the gallery's Advisory Commission.

A selection of the exhibitions planned also for the current academic year are: an exhibition of contemporary sculpture highlighting the work of seven Pennsylvanian artists who share a minimalist's interest in line and shape; the Regional Scholastics Competition which is held every year and shows the work of outstanding junior and senior high school students — an excellent community service program as well as a recruiting effort for Wilkes College; the first in a series of exhibitions called "Director's Choice" in which the work of four young painters will be included; and an exhibition of outstanding museum posters organized by the Richmond Art Gallery in British Columbia.

The Sordoni Art Gallery will welcome the members of the MAAM with an exhibition drawn from the permanent collection including gifts and purchases to the college since its founding in 1933. The staff of the Gallery look forward to seeing MAAM members in Northeastern Pennsylvania during October.

Judith O'Toole is Director of the Sordoni Gallery.

Susan Fiedler
Claire 11
Soylent
Ellen Friedman

Andy Bayley
Carol 11
Steve 11

Frank Townsend
Steve
③ Carol

② Bigley
Jock Jock Cunningham
Jack 11

Mary Konrad
Dr. Joseph De Imbriglia
Barbara Miller
④ Jean Adams

Friedman
Marilyn Marilyn Friedman
Judy OT
Annie Bohlin

(Harriet Ruggles
Russ
① Hilda Finner

Dr. Cox ⑤

Susan Friedman
Ellen Abramowitz
Joe Friedman
Jean Adams 7

Kevin OT
Judy
Russ Roberts
Betty Fulton
Kevin Lew
Kim Chee ⑥

Paul
Jean
Larry Cangelmi
(Hogarth
portrayal)

VPs & wives
(from sit)

Cox
Judy
Charles Petrullo
Marilyn
Annie

































































