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Behind the Scenes: Tales from SECAC Conference Chairs

Initially, I wrote a proposal for this session recalling my experiences as conference chair of SECAC 1998 in Miami Beach. But thinking that this would be self-indulgent and that I might bore people to tears relating horror stories that are etched in my memory—even though, in retrospect, some are hilarious—I then thought that it might prove useful and enjoyable to hear first from other conference chairs. Aside from those brave few who have signed on for a second time, SECAC conference chairs have one common denominator: we are all rank amateurs when we assume the position. None of us are experienced, prepared for, or necessarily even suited to the task that lies before us. I sent a questionnaire to twenty-seven former conference chairs, and seven responded. Four had chaired or co-chaired more than one annual meeting, so in a sense, if one were to calculate the number of meetings covered, I received eleven responses. I thank those who took the time to reply, especially Randy Mack of the University of South Carolina for his very detailed answers, and intend to submit those comments to SECAC; they may well prove valuable to future chairs. Furthermore, they provide a composite picture of the brave souls who have chosen to take on such a task—essentially, to give up two to four years of one's life for a worthy conference that, in the end, becomes a single line on the *curriculum vitae*. In her response, Linda Gigante of the University of Louisville suggested that the Board of Directors might institute an annual “exit interview” for conference chairs. Good idea!

Time does not permit detailed summaries and analyses of the answers to each question, so I've selected a few to discuss and have added my own answers to the mix, followed by a longer account of SECAC '98. One of the questionnaire's first queries was: “What were your reason(s) for volunteering to be a conference chair, your goals and expectations.” For the most part, the answers were similar. The majority were relatively young (under fifty) and recently had achieved tenure; many wanted to highlight their departments (Linda Gigante, Lawrence Jenkins of the University of New Orleans and then the University of North Carolina at Greensboro), whether because of a new graduate program, as in my case, or, as in the case of Michael Aurbach at Vanderbilt, a new building and an enlivened art scene in Nashville. Others elected to do so because SECAC had never been to their city (Linda Gigante, Bonita Billman of Georgetown University in Washington, D. C., and myself), and because the SECAC Board of Directors had expressed interest in having a conference there. As one might assume, all were experienced SECACers and devotees, which goes a long way to explain why they would take on a daunting, several-year project with no refereed publication or solo exhibition at its end. I think that Randy Mack's first, succinct answer to the question “Why did you volunteer to be conference chair?” may speak for us all. He wrote, “Fundamental insanity.”

Answers to the queries as to the number and extent to which the chairs' colleagues helped with the conference varied widely, and this seems to have reflected the degree of each faculty's familiarity with SECAC. Lesson: if few or none of your colleagues have been SECAC participants, only a few will be “on board,” much less attend the conference, and your experience will be utterly unsatisfying, as it seems to have been for Bonita Billman. In each instance, chairs found the help of their institutions' program chairs and colleagues indispensable, but in the main it was the chair who “does the yeoman's work,” as Michael Aurbach put it. I concur.

Another question was: “Do you think that your field and area of specialization played a decisive role in the conference program? In what ways?” All but two wrote a simple “no,” which implied to me a withering “Why would you even think to ask?” (Studio art and art history, we are one! Let us maintain the fiction!) Artist Michael Aurbach and Meredith College art historian Beth

Mulvaney had more nuanced answers, both of which resonated with me. Michael's response was a resounding "yes!" and he wrote that he gave "great attention to member exhibitions." Among other things, resourcefully he circulated the slides to other venues in Nashville of members who had applied that year for the SECAC Annual Juried Exhibition and for the Artist's Fellowship; consequently, several SECACers were given exhibitions at the prestigious Frist Center for the Visual Arts. Beth, one of those who has chaired two meetings, said that on her first go-around, she called upon those she knew from SECAC and other conferences to be session chairs and presenters. The second time, her focus was on developing a well-rounded program.

Like Beth, for the 1998 meeting in Miami I called on friends to submit session proposals, not only before the deadline but also after that, when I saw gaping lacunae in the topics to be covered. I left the studio sessions to my able studio-art co-chairs, Florida International University colleagues Clive King and Kate Kretz, but I couldn't content myself with the initial draft of the art-history program. If memory serves, there was not a single nineteenth-century European session, nothing in ancient art nor medieval art prior to the Gothic period, no Asian sessions, nothing on architecture, and nothing that addressed African American art or art history. To me, for an organization with the name Southeastern College Art Conference, especially this last "nothing" was a hole that needed to be filled. I wanted the program to be both comprehensive and inclusive, but it was a challenge. After some discussion, the program chair for Western art history organized several open sessions to fill in gaps, but some remained. What to do? Boom, I got on the horn post haste (my email was at that moment out of commission—a tale of its own) and called friends, among others former Florence, Italy, apartment-mate Shaw Smith, who immediately offered to chair a session on Delacroix and dictated the proposal to me then and there. I believe this started the "FOB" refrain (not for then-President of the United States Bill C. but for Barbara W.) that recurred as situations presented themselves, as we shall see.

I had expected a session proposal from Bruce Cole that had not yet materialized. At SECAC '97 in Richmond, he'd told me that he'd like to offer a session on Heinrich Wölfflin's *Classic Art*, given that 1998 would be the centennial year of its publication. Unfortunately, he'd failed to post anything. One of the art-history program chairs, who also knew him, told me something like, "I know Bruce, that's just him; he never follows through on this sort of thing; just forget it." My internal response to that was no, not for my conference—which had to be perfect and which should have all the art historians I knew, liked, and admired in attendance. I contacted Indiana University and reached Bruce's able assistant, who told me that she usually taped important messages to his office doorknob and would do so with mine. A waiting game followed, with no response. So I wrote a session blurb in Bruce's name titled "*Wölfflin's Classic Art: Is It a Classic?*" and it went into the call for papers. After the session—I could only make it for the last ten minutes—Bruce told me that in his introductory remarks, he had taken my name in vain, for not until he saw the call for papers did he know that he was to be a session organizer and chair. I'm told the session was excellent, especially given its blend of major scholars from two generations: W. Eugene Kleinbauer and Vernon Hyde Minor with Bruce as respondent. I'm not a fan of Sarah Palin, but sometimes one needs to be a maverick.

And so it went. Being comprehensive and inclusive was not so "easy" a task on other fronts, and I think that this still poses a challenge to SECAC, however not so much now as then. I had to give up on an Asian session, as a major conference on Asian art was scheduled for the same days as SECAC, and every Asian scholar in the Southeast had already committed to that other meeting. The African American art session was another matter. Initially, I had no luck with the

historians and art historians in Southeastern institutions. So I shifted the emphasis to studio and pedagogy and enlisted the help of Alvin Pondexter, an apparently overworked—and with new baby—African American artist at Florida Memorial College, whom I'd never met and who, I'm sure, came to dread my phone calls. Basically, I tele-harassed him for months, and met him for the first time only at the conference itself. In fact, he was most gracious. One of the people who was to speak in his session was an elderly (or so it seemed) gentleman who was concerned about everything—his paper, its title, transportation from the airport, accommodations—you name it. He called me nearly every morning from June through October. He was a human wake-up call; I no longer needed to set the alarm.

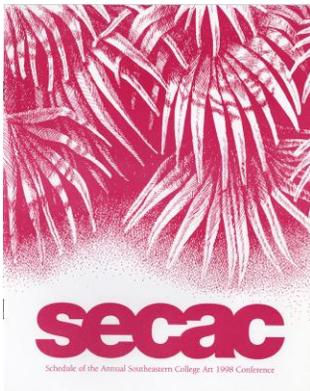
From the preceding anecdotes, my response to the same question, about whether my particular discipline played a significant role in planning the meeting, should be clear. Being an art historian, naturally, I was more interested in that part of the program, as I've already indicated. And yet, I was and am an art historian in a studio-art department, continually needing to prove my departmental fidelity, i.e. demonstrate my studio cred. So I jumped at Florida International University colleague R. F. Buckley's offer to organize an iron-pour demonstration and at colleague Richard Duncan's offer to organize an open-portfolio session through the Southern Graphics Council. Most significantly, with the help of colleagues Bill Burke and Jim Couper we held the first-ever members' art exhibition, the desire for which had been a bleating refrain at SECAC Board of Directors meetings during the years I'd been on the board. I had the audacity to advertise it as the "First Annual Juried Exhibition of Works by Members of the Southeastern College Art Conference," thus putting the onus on every subsequent conference chair to organize a members' exhibition, and each has. Two South Florida artists won the prizes, Peggy Levison Nolan for her photographic *Wedding Installation* and Carol Todaro for her book *Sudden Flutter*, now in the permanent collection of the Jaffe Center for Book Arts at Florida Atlantic University.



Peggy Levison Nolan, *Wedding Installation*, photographic ensemble and two details, 1998.

Another matter addressed in my questionnaire to past directors concerned “Things that went awry and how you handled matters before, during, and after the conference.” This one elicited juicy responses for sure, particularly from Randy Mack, he of the “Fundamental insanity” remark to explain why he volunteered to direct a meeting and twice a conference chair. He provided two rich tales that occurred during the 1976 conference in Charleston, South Carolina: one of an infestation of palmetto bugs (roaches on steroids) in the conference hotel; the other, an inebriation issue. Shock and horror! One story must suffice. To use Randy’s adjectives, this is a tale of a “boisterous,” “besotted,” and “pugnacious” attendee, who after the bicentennial banquet, followed by a thorough sampling Charleston’s nightlife, returned to the hotel after 2:00 a.m. and became riled because the restaurant was closed and naught in the way of food was to be had. The situation escalated to the point that the hotel’s night clerk called Randy and, in an “hysterical voice,” informed him that “he had just been assaulted by a convention member and that he was about to call the police.” Randy deftly defused the situation with observations from both perspectives as to the potentially negative consequences of police involvement in this “non-event,” in which the clerk had not really been hurt. Ultimately, and after the SECACer had begun to show signs of sobriety, “the two shook hands.” I wonder whether Randy had any more sleep that night.

At this point, I turn exclusively to SECAC ’98 in Miami Beach, for it provides many tales. These are but a few. O, Muse Thalia—and failing you, the spirit of Aristophanes—please inspire me!



Kate Kretz, program cover for the SECAC meeting in Miami featuring a drawing by the artist, seen here alongside its photographic source also by the artist, both from 1998. Note in the photograph the conference director’s dog Brianna playing with a ball.

I had thought about being a conference chair for years and decided to volunteer especially after Clive King came to Florida International University to be department chair. Clive had taken to SECAC as a duck to water. After receiving tenure, I took the plunge. Of course, I wanted the Miami conference to be the best ever, and by 1995, had developed a list of imperatives: an ocean-front hotel; receptions with plentiful, delectable food; free, flavorful coffee served in porcelain cups (no Styrofoam!); and a keynote speaker who would keep the audience attentive and awake even after a long day followed by libations. Finally, remembering the unforgettable party at Graceland that concluded the 1991 meeting in Memphis, I wanted a Saturday-night party on the water or at a waterfront location with a band that played songs that baby boomers easily could dance to.

Yes, I wanted all to be perfect, and yes, things certainly did go awry—before, during, and after the conference. Largely, the challenges were due to three related facts: 1) Miami-Dade is a sprawling metropolis, but unlike other large cities it is one without a central core where cultural

institutions are clustered; 2) it lacks a comprehensive public transportation system; and 3) Florida International University has two campuses twenty-seven miles apart and over an hour's drive from one another (close to two during rush hours). And then, as always, there was the question of money. In addition, each FIU administrator who provided funds for SECAC '98—virtually all of them men—wanted to support events on his campus only. Territorialism, therefore, became a factor as well. In short, geography, transportation, and ego—all of them inflected by dollar signs—had become issues. At the start, I tried to keep logistics as simple as possible. It was not to be. By the end, SECAC was literally and figuratively all over the map.

We've come a long way in the thirty years since the television series *Miami Vice* was filmed in South Florida, but still, as a recent essay in the *New York Times* asserted, Miami is not there yet (Jill Druckerman, "Miami Grows Up. A Little," August 8, 2014). That's also true of Florida International University despite what its president and public-relations department maintain. An acerbic colleague of mine once claimed that "FIU" is an acronym for "f--- it up." I prefer the more genteel *Saturday Night Live* phrase "not ready for prime time" (NRFPT). Whichever, both were and are operative for Miami-Dade, my august institution—and myself. As my tale unfolds, please keep this in mind.

My original plan was not ideal, but simple and doable: convene the conference at the newly built state-of-the-art Kovens Conference Center at FIU's second, Biscayne Bay Campus, my home campus located in North Miami. The conference hotel would be the reasonably priced Newport Beach Resort Hotel, only ten minutes away. The negative aspect of this was that transportation to and fro would be necessary. But a positive possibility emerged to correct that: a Venetian-like water shuttle between the Kovens and the hotel, which the Kovens director promised would be in place by '98.

As its name indicates, the Newport Beach Resort Hotel was on the beach—number one on my "imperatives" list. However, it was not located where things were happening—ten miles south on South Beach with its Lincoln Road Mall—where we'd arranged to have the SECAC members' art exhibition. Save the very expensive Fontainebleau, there were no conference hotels on South Beach. The conference-capable Loews Miami Beach Hotel was then still under construction; it was due to open in 1997, but would it? Remember, we're talking Miami, where punctuality is as rare as an election day that runs smoothly. And indeed, the Loews didn't open until December 1998, two months after the conference. The Newport would have to do, and besides, it was just a straight shot down Route A1A to the happening scene; buses, shuttles, and cabs could get SECACers there and back. I reserved the Kovens Center, and with it I locked in a good room price for the Newport Beach. Naturally the contract agreement that I had signed with the Kovens had to be re-examined, reissued, and re-signed a year or so later when a new director took charge there.

As things were rolling along, I became a mendicant to every administrator at FIU, gathering money here, there, and everywhere. Then, out of the blue, a swerve: studio-art program co-chair Clive King suggested a change in venue. Clive had never liked the idea of the Biscayne Bay Campus location with the conference hotel in the sedate Sunny Isles neighborhood, miles away from the South Beach scene and the "true" Miami Beach experience. In his peregrinations along the beach, he'd found a hotel that had just been renovated so as to accommodate small conferences, the Four Points by Sheraton—a mere twenty-six blocks from South Beach.

In short order we changed venues. It seemed a simple thing and a no-brainer to move to this more advantageous location with one-stop-shopping convenience in the form of a hotel that could also accommodate the conference's sessions and panels. Simple, however, was just not

to be. For with this change, geography, transportation, and other unforeseeable factors came into play. *Fortuna's* wheel had begun to turn and gradually split apart as SECAC '98 spread across Miami-Dade such that by the end, its spokes extended throughout the county.

In September or early October 1997 we learned that the ArtCenter South Florida, the site of the SECAC Annual Juried Exhibition, had lost its lease on Lincoln Road and would be “in transit” during the coming year or so. My colleague at FIU Bill Burke, who had undertaken the SECAC exhibition project, swiftly found us an alternative space—the front half of the edgy Ambrosino Gallery, located in the warehouse/gallery district of Coral Gables. Great!—except for the Coral Gables location, over thirteen miles from the new hotel and miles away from both of FIU's campuses.

In the course of the next year, plans for receptions and events changed again and again. The day, time, and location of the plenary address moved so often it became the peripatetic plenary. There was no room at the Four Points large enough for it, and the nearby Fontainebleau Hotel was too costly. Besides, we wanted it to be coupled with a museum reception. Over time, the plenary travelled from the Wolfsonian-FIU Museum on South Beach to the Miami Art Museum in downtown Miami, and then to FIU's main campus way to the southwest in Homestead. In the end, we staged it at FIU's Biscayne Bay Campus in the northeastern portion of the metropolitan area, largely because Vice-President Victor Correnti had become my fan and chief financial supporter. *Ergo*, a major event had to be at BBC. However, those “other unforeseeable factors” already alluded to came into play—primarily money and FIU politics: it became clear that we also had to have a major event at the FIU Art Museum at the University Park Campus in far-off Homestead. Ugh!

We had reserved a block of rooms not only at the Four Points by Sheraton but also at the Best Western. The two hotels were under common ownership, and the Best Western was likewise on the ocean just a block further south and ten dollars per night lower in price. With the memory from 1991 in Memphis of photographs in an Elvis car at Graceland in mind, a week before the conference I met with the student-photographers whose help I'd enlisted to scout out an appropriate place for SECACers to have their pictures taken beside a *papier-mâché* flamingo at the Saturday night pool-side Halloween party at the Four Points.



A flamingo joins the Miami conference director and program co-chairs, left to right: Carol Damian, Perri Lee Roberts, Barbara Watts, Clive King, Kate Kretz.

Afterwards, I thought I'd just stop by and check out the Best Western once again. Shock and horror *redux*! Upon entering the lobby, I found that no longer was there a lobby—it had been

completely sealed off by a wooden wall with a sign tacked onto it that said something like “Pardon our dust while we make things better for you.” No lobby, no view of the ocean, no real bar, nowhere to congregate. I was apoplectic. We couldn’t switch the rooms to the Four Points this late as no more rooms were available. Livid that I’d not been informed of the planned renovation, I felt that I deserved the proverbial pound of flesh and demanded it.

Uncharacteristic of Barbara, those of you who know me might think, but this was my SECAC, and it was to be perfect. In the end, we cut a deal with the hotel owners to the benefit of FOBs and SECAC board members: twenty-seven of the rooms reserved for us in the two hotels were upgraded to oceanfront status, most with balconies.

I’d captivated Vice-President Correnti with the “wonders” of the planned Miami SECAC meeting, and when the conference drew near, he invited me to give a presentation about it to FIU’s president, Modesto (Mitch) Madique and his inner circle at one of their weekly meetings, indeed the one scheduled for the Kovens Conference Center on Wednesday the 27th of October, the day before the membership convened. I’d have ninety seconds. Wonderful, one would think, and I did so at the time. Then, a light bulb in my head turned on. In a year and a half, I’d not given the Kovens Conference Center a thought; not until Correnti’s invitation did it dawn on me that long before this I should have cancelled my agreement with the Kovens to hold SECAC sessions there. Suddenly, I thought that the Kovens was expecting us, rooms reserved and ready, and, of course, with a forty-thousand-dollar bill to be paid. For the five days between Vice-President Correnti’s invitation and the meeting, I was in a state of utter panic, shame, dread, humiliation—you name it; and I told no one, save the conference mascot, my dog Brianna.

Maybe I was thinking to take the ethical high road, and maybe not. But this much I knew: I had been negligent, and I couldn’t put the onus on SECAC. I’d have to declare bankruptcy, might lose my job, and worse—my fear of fears—become a bag lady pushing a shopping cart along Biscayne Boulevard. Walking into the Kovens that morning was a killer—especially insofar as the first person I met was the Kovens Center’s director. At that instant, I rather would have faced death. She approached and graciously wished me well, but added that since she hadn’t heard from me she’d assumed plans had changed. Relief!!! I would not become a bag lady. God is good. I gave my presentation; President Madique was so enthralled with the program that he gave me over three minutes to speak. Later that day his secretary called to say he’d allotted one thousand dollars for our students to attend. Hooray! But a few years had been shaved from my life, and the next trauma was only a day away, calling for a return to maps and the problem of transportation.

Miami-Dade County is sprawling, and SECAC events had been planned throughout its length and breadth, not only at FIU’s two campuses but also at the University of Miami and the Ambrosino Gallery, both in Coral Gables, and at the FIU-Wolfsonian Museum on South Beach, a total of six gatherings and receptions, each in a different location. Buses, therefore, became a critical component of the conference. Another lesson: forget trying to be comprehensive, or—my mantra once again—keep it simple. I had engaged a bus company that had been highly recommended and did not give the matter further thought until the company asked for detailed directions to each site a few days before the conference. GPS and MapQuest, why weren’t you invented a decade earlier? I wrote detailed routes for navigation to and around each venue, faxed them to the bus company, and thought all was well—fool that I was. What I didn’t know was that the conference days, October 28-30, were not only those of SECAC but also of the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show, and that the best and most experienced drivers were given that more lucrative gig, not ours. Stated otherwise, our drivers probably had moved to

South Florida yesterday, knew little more than how to get from the airport to *Calle Ocho* and South Beach, and hadn't a clue about navigating north and south Miami-Dade.

On day one of the meeting, as SECACers were boarding the buses that would take them to FIU's Biscayne Bay Campus for a reception at the Wolfe Center followed by the awards ceremony and plenary address, I left by car to make certain that everything was in order at BBC before the buses arrived. En route, I remembered that I'd forgotten to bring my "Itty Bitty Booklight," my back-up plan in case the podium had no reading light. As Leon Battista Alberti wrote in *Della Pittura*, "Nothing can be seen without light," and this includes the text of a plenary address. I'd requested a lighted podium, but the Wolfe Center director didn't know whether it had one, said she'd check on it, and then get back to me. She hadn't, and I did not remember that she hadn't until the night before, in the midst of a fitful wake-up around 3:00 a.m. Thus the "Itty Bitty Booklight" back-up plan.

I live near the Biscayne Bay Campus. It would add only ten minutes, fifteen at most, to scoot home, dash in and pick up the booklight. I would get to school as the buses were arriving or just after that. Besides, colleague Richard Duncan would be at the bus stop waiting to escort all to the Wolfe Center's loggia and ballroom, and colleagues Ed del Valle and Mirta Gomez would be on site making sure that all was in order for the reception and subsequent events. So, no problem, I thought: I could zip home with no one the wiser. Then it dawned on me: NO, I can't go home. For my ball-obsessed papillon dog, Brianna, would insist on her half-hour walk followed by a nine-inning, hour-plus game of jump and fetch. (Boris Castillo, a former student and dog-sitter to Brianna, would not yet have arrived.) Lesson to all, not just for future conference chairs: do not adopt a papillion, the descendant of the toy spaniel featured in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and pictured in so many Renaissance portrait paintings, thinking that she/he will be a demure, cuddly lap-dog. Think instead of an obsessive-compulsive demanding dynamo with DNA that makes it believe that it can fly over tall buildings. In lieu of going home, I stopped at Walgreens to buy flashlights both large and small and duct tape. Girl Scout prepared, I continued to campus and raced to the Wolfe Center loggia where the reception should already have been underway. But it wasn't. I entered the loggia and found a table laden with food, but not a soul. *Nessuno*. I ran around the walkway to where the buses should have been parked. They weren't. *Niente*. I raced up the stairs to the ballroom, wondering if I had experienced a time warp or had terribly underestimated the time I'd spent in Walgreens, thinking that I had missed the reception and that the awards ceremony had begun without me. But no: an empty room. Again *niente, nessuno*. Sleep-deprived that I was, I thought that I was hallucinating or had fallen into Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone*. Was this a nightmare or had I entered a parallel universe? Worse yet, I then thought that when writing the bus directions, I'd confused the days of the conference and mistakenly had directed the Thursday buses to FIU's University Park Campus in Homestead, where we were to have Friday night's reception: if so, at that at that moment, they would be wending their way, snail-like, through rush-hour traffic to arrive at a museum that was closed for the day. Or did this event happen yesterday and I'd forgotten it and was playing it over *à la Ground Hog Day*? Panic attack? You betcha.

Finally, I found my colleagues Ed and Mirta, who had been off getting management to open the ballroom's partition and a variety of other things that hadn't been done. Although they'd seen no one from the conference, their presence at least told me that I had not completely lost it. And I saw that, indeed, it had behooved me to stop for flashlights: the podium had no reading light. Ed and Mirta taped the two mini-flashlights I'd purchased to the microphone. Not ideal for a SECAC plenary address, but business as usual for FIU.

I'll return to this narrative regarding the plenary address momentarily. But first, what about the reception without people and the errant buses? Well, finally they arrived, and a motley crew of bedraggled SECACers took respite in food and libations, exchanging stories of the "misadventure" they had experienced in what should have been an eight-mile straight-shot two-turn-only journey from the hotel to the Biscayne Bay Campus. Simple, one would think, but no: the buses—all four of them—got lost, probably because the drivers didn't know that 163rd Street also goes by the name 167th. Betsy Fahlman told me that the bus she was on kept turning around, doubling back, and that at one juncture it drove over a curb and sidewalk into an empty lot to reconnoiter—all in the dark. Just one tale among many of the *autobus perduti*. Little did busing SECACers know what awaited them in two hours, when they embarked from the reception and plenary address for the Museum of Contemporary Art, not to mention the next day's forays to Homestead and Coral Gables. Yet another lesson: a co-pilot is essential; have someone who knows the way on each bus. Now, back to the Wolfe Center and the plenary.

Despite the stressful bus-adventure prelude, Thursday evening's first reception was a success, even though the main topic of conversation seemed to be the bus trip rather than the papers delivered at the hotel earlier in the day. Then came the awards ceremony and the plenary address. The speaker was Paul Barolsky, my dissertation advisor at the University of Virginia. I had asked him to do this not only because I wanted to ensure that he would attend, but also because while planning the conference I'd read his book *The Faun in the Garden: Michelangelo and the Poetic Origins of Italian Renaissance Art* (Penn State UP, 1994). His evocative chapter on Luca Signorelli's *School of Pan* had so touched me that, after years of virtual non-communication, I'd written to him about it. Initially he had titled his SECAC paper "The Poetic Origins of Art." Fine, I thought, though when we spoke on the telephone, I remarked that I very much wanted the address to be of interest to artists and art historians alike, and that in the past some plenary addresses had put me to sleep. Sounding a bit miffed, PB (as his advisees called him) responded that he thought his paper would be of interest to all. And I thought that was that. But no, shortly thereafter he wrote me a note announcing that he'd changed his topic and the new title was to be "A Brief History of Erotic Art, Starring the Goddess of Love Herself (A Personal View)." Whoa! A bit worried, I broached the matter of political correctness when next we spoke, saying something about gay issues and not even mentioning feminist ones under the assumption that he was attentive to them. Sounding a bit miffed again, he assured me that he'd taken that into account and said he'd written a "nice essay." With other things to do, I once again thought about it no more.

Let us recall, albeit briefly, the matter of podium lighting. In a nutshell, the flashlights taped to the podium microphone did not hold up, literally and figuratively. Ed and Mirta are short, about five feet and five feet, five inches tall, respectively. They had taped the lights to the microphone at angles that would work for them, but not, it seems, for someone over six feet tall, as is PB. He tried to adjust the lights, but the microphone's hinge kept slipping. After a few attempts to read his paper without light, he called out "Help, Barbara! Do you have a flashlight?" To the surprise and amusement of many, Girl Scout Barbara leaped from her seat with new mega-flashlight in hand, which PB used to deliver his talk. Now to the address itself.

Those of you who know Paul Barolsky, or know of him, may recall that his first book was *Infinite Jest: Wit and Humor in Italian Renaissance Art* (Penn State UP, 1978), one chapter of which is titled "Laughter in the Venetian Boudoir." Extend this subject both ways in time and place, imagine its presentation by Rabelais, and assume that the speaker chooses to bypass contemporary scholarship in feminism or gender studies. At the outset PB said that he was

giving “a personal view.” Indeed it was. His paper will go down in history as the wittiest, most salacious, hilarious, and politically incorrect, heterosexual-male, gender-biased plenary in SECAC history, and probably in the history of plenary addresses. He covered the gamut—from Titian’s suggestive mythological paintings, to Boucher’s coy nudes and Fragonard’s nymphs and nubile females cavorting with dogs, to paintings by Picasso and Wesselman—offending virtually every gender-issue-sensitive person in the audience, especially feminists. On the upside, PB’s address elicited a more lively post-plenary conversation than I have ever heard, before or since.

Following the plenary address, it was back to the buses for a short trip to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), which like FIU’s Biscayne Bay Campus is in North Miami, a mere four miles and straight down Biscayne Boulevard before one, and only one, right turn. No problem, one would think. But think again: this is Miami-Dade, where street names are multiple and change on a dime. This time, that one right turn onto 125th Street was the problem. For whatever reason, on Biscayne Boulevard, the cross street marked 125th is an inconsequential road that in 1998 led to a trailer park. The “real” 125th Street, the one that everyone familiar with the area knows as 125th, has a street sign on Biscayne Boulevard that reads 123rd Street. Why? Who knows? This is Miami—NRFPT. The signage as 123rd Street continues for a few blocks west of Biscayne Boulevard until the railroad tracks, and crossing them is like crossing the Rubicon: not only have you entered another municipality, but magically 123rd Street becomes 125th. Apparently but understandably the novice bus drivers did not know this. Later, one SECAC rider who happened to have grown up in North Miami told me, “The bus driver was flailing—after getting out of the trailer park, he ended up on 135th and west of MOCA, heading towards I-95. I told him ‘Turn around, you’re going in the wrong direction,’ which after a while he did, but then he headed north rather than south. We went almost as far as Aventura before I got him to reverse course.”

Day one ended at the Museum of Contemporary Art—eventually! After dinner nearby with Paul Barolsky, Bruce Cole and other FOBs, I returned home and found my fearless, impatient, and barking papillon atop the washing machine, ball in tow and ready for action. SECAC ’98 in Miami has many more tales to tell, but here, at least for now, mine shall end.

Would I do it again? If Clive King and Kate Kretz were still at FIU, you betcha.