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SECAC from 1998 to 2014: Reflecting on the Organization's Increase in Size and Stature

Good afternoon and warm greetings. Thank you, Bill Levin, for organizing this session and others that have brought members of long standing together in order to reflect and reminisce about our shared past in the Southeastern College Art Conference. My inclusion in this year's panel must mean I am officially part of the old guard and that I've become a village elder! When Bill invited me to be a part of this, I really had no clear idea of what I would discuss. Certainly this is my first conference presentation where the first-person pronoun will be used so much, and that's saying something, for I have presented papers and chaired sessions at SECAC meetings every year—most years doing both—since 1998, and this year is no exception!

This presentation comes at a particularly fitting time for me and my relationship with SECAC. I became a member of the Board of Directors representing the state of Florida in 2001. I was reelected to a second term in 2004, but when after two years as president Randy Mack stepped down a year early, I was elected to the office of first vice-president for a four-year stint, completing the final year of Don Van Horn's elected term as first vice-president when he replaced Randy as president and then immediately commencing with my own regular three-year term in that position. This was followed by the great privilege of serving as president of the organization from 2008 to 2011. I've continued to serve on the SECAC board and its Executive Committee as immediate past-president over the last three years. Thus my ten years of service as an officer and thirteen years on the SECAC board comes to end with this conference, as Floyd Martin hands over the gavel of leadership to our very capable Jason Guynes.

In these next few minutes I will review SECAC memories and recollections of my time with this vibrant organization and how, as it has increased in size and stature, it has intersected with my professional and personal life.

My first SECAC meeting occurred several hours south of here in 1998 when Barbara Watts of Florida International University chaired the very successful Miami conference, one of the largest meetings to date. In fact, two hotels were necessary to accommodate the 500-plus attendees. Although I had been to numerous CAA meetings, I had never been to SECAC. I remember walking into the lobby for registration and meeting Robert Lemon, who was then the president, and Anne Thomas, our magnificent former administrator and a longtime member of the organization. I'll never forget how warm and welcoming they were. I still remember that Bob complimented my scarf!

My paper that year was included in a session titled "Women as Facilitators of Art: Patrons, Teachers, Directors, and Agents" chaired by Margaret Skoglund from the University of Southern Indiana. It considered "The Bequests of Charlotte Pruyn Hyde and Ninah May Holden Cummer," the former of the Hyde Collection in Glens Falls, New York, and the latter of the Cummer Museum in Jacksonville. I was in the early stages of my studies on the life and work of painter and museum curator and director Joseph Jeffers Dodge, and both of these interesting women figured prominently in his life and also in the cultural lives of their respective communities. I would go on to give papers at other SECAC meetings about Dodge, one at the Louisville conference in 2000 and the other on the influence of the blues and jazz on Dodge's work at the New Orleans conference in 2008. The feedback from colleagues in response to those and other papers over the years was invaluable, and I noted my appreciation to SECAC in regard to my

presentations concerning Dodge in the foreword to the book I wrote about him, published in 2002 by the Cummer Museum.

But back to Miami! We were still using slides during those years, and I remember clearly that one of my slides became stuck in its carousel. Thankfully the problem was quickly remedied. I also remember meeting Kay Arthur, who was in the audience at that first presentation. She had earned her B. A. from Skidmore, not far from Glens Falls, and was interested to see a reference to Mrs. Hyde in the conference program. Many of you know that Kay has been one of our most accomplished and dedicated members over the years. She was recognized for exemplary achievement, SECAC's highest honor, in 2008.

It was also in 1998 that I had the great fortune to meet Liana De Girolami Cheney. I'm not quite sure how I came to be introduced to Liana, but I remember seeing her surrounded by a group of people, of which she was very much the center. Although previously our paths had never crossed, the next thing I knew she invited me to dinner with this engaging bunch that I think may have included Barbara Watts. The invitation was typical of Liana's grace and generosity, and over the years she has included me in a number of Renaissance sessions not only at SECAC but also at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in Puerto Rico, the Renaissance Society of America meeting in New York, and the South Central Renaissance Conference in St. Louis. I mention Liana not only because I admire her work but because these personal and professional relationships are typical of the fruits that result from involvement in this organization over the years.

Within two days in Miami I had met outstanding individuals that would influence my academic and professional path over the next sixteen years, right up to the present. Before leaving Miami I must include another vivid memory. On October 29, 1998, the first American to orbit the earth made history again. John Glenn became the oldest man to fly in space by serving as a payload specialist on STS-95 aboard the space shuttle Discovery. I still recall peering out a window to see crowds on the beach looking north to see if there was any chance to witness the launch of the shuttle.

In addition to collegiality, SECAC has been extremely generous in welcoming young scholars at the beginning of their careers. Gulnar Bosch Travel Awards are given annually to graduate students to help defray the cost of journeying to our meetings. I would like to take a moment to honor Gulnar Bosch. Gulnar Kheirallah Bosch served as SECAC president in 1958 and often presented papers at the annual meetings. She was born October 31, 1909, on the Oglala Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, where her father was a doctor. The family moved to Chicago where Bosch completed high school at the age of fifteen, and after a period of extensive travel and study, she returned to Chicago to earn a doctorate from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Her college teaching career began in 1941 at Florida State College for Women, now Florida State University, and following teaching appointments in Georgia and Louisiana, she returned to Florida State in 1960 as head of the Department of Art, a post she held until 1977. Gulnar Bosch continued as an active member of SECAC for many years following her retirement. She died on October 9, 1998.

I was a graduate student at FSU in the late seventies, when Gulnar was the head of the department. I had originally met her when I first participated in the six-month-long FSU Florence Program as an undergraduate and she was on the faculty. I remember thinking how exotic she was. During the summer break she went to Outer Mongolia. This twenty-year-old

from the suburbs of Jacksonville had never met such an interesting woman. I'll never forget on a cold and rainy November morning in Florence stopping in a bar across from the Pitti Palace for a warm *cappuccino*. I was lost in thought when I heard a familiar voice at the end of the bar order a *caffè corretto*. I had no idea there was such a thing as an espresso with a shot of *grappa*, a 'corrected coffee'. So in addition to art history she taught me about numerous other aspects of the cultural richness of Italy!

Gulnar and her husband Gerry were early leaders of SECAC. As I mentioned earlier, Gulnar served as president in 1958, exactly fifty years before I became president. As Professor Emerita Martha Caldwell remembered in her remarks titled "Forty-Five Years Later" that were read during a session in 2001 also chaired by Bill Levin celebrating the then-imminent sixtieth anniversary of the founding of our organization—a paper that along with two others presented at that session is accessible on the SECAC website—Gulnar discussed the possibility of leaving a bequest in her will to express her appreciation for the organization. Thus the Bosch endowment honors her legacy in perpetuity as it supports our future artists and scholars with travel awards.

I didn't have the pleasure of knowing at first hand Gerry Bosch, Gulnar's husband, who was a professor of art at Columbus State University in Georgia. But in an odd turn of events, a woman in Jacksonville named Elaine Cornell had a painting by Gerry, and she wanted it to go to a good home. Ms. Cornell's father had known the Bosches when he taught at the Florida State College for Women. In addition, her father was the godson of the Bosches' son, Jarir, who had died while in prep school in 1965 at the age of seventeen. Now, decades later, Ms. Cornell contacted Rachel Frew, our current SECAC administrator, and to my great joy I am the present owner of that painting, titled *Afternoon Shade*, from April of 1942.

Returning to the tradition of generosity associated with SECAC as seen in the bequest of Gulnar Bosch, the organizer of these sessions, Bill Levin, has recently endowed the William R. Levin Award for Research in the History of Art. Our beloved Bill has been a member of SECAC since 1987; served on the Board of Directors; published in our scholarly journal; received the SECAC Award for Excellence in Scholarly Research and Publication in 2004; and was recognized in 2010 with two more of the organization's highest honors, the Excellence in Teaching Award and the Exemplary Achievement Award. It was an honor to serve this year on the selection committee for the first Levin award with Betsy Fahlman and Janet Snyder. The recipient will be announced at the awards luncheon on Saturday.

Obviously there is not sufficient time to reflect on every SECAC meeting, but some of my favorite memories are of the incredible opportunities to visit museums and other such venues that I might not have seen otherwise, like the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk in 1999 with its collection of Tiffany glass, the Speed Museum in Louisville in 2000, the Arkansas Art Center and the newly opened Clinton Library in 2005 in Little Rock, the Huntington Museum in West Virginia in 2007, and the Reynolda House last year in Winston-Salem. SECAC's annual meetings were immeasurably enriched during the years when it was possible to have joint meetings with SESA, the Southeastern Society of Architectural Historians. I especially remember one tour as part of the 2001 conference hosted by the University of South Carolina. It included visits to a nineteenth-century church, a plantation home, and an International Style residence. The tours organized at the New Orleans conference in 2008 chaired by Lawrence Jenkins also included visits to plantation homes.

My own experience in planning didn't go quite as smoothly as these others when I chaired the conference in Jacksonville in 2004. A bus transported a group to St. Augustine to tour Flagler College, originally the historic Flagler Hotel. Upon our departure we traveled up Florida State Road A1A along the Atlantic Ocean and were welcomed to the J. Johnson Gallery and a lovely reception. We had barely begun our return from there to the Adam's Mark Hotel in Jacksonville when the bus experienced mechanical problems. After several hours of delay we were finally delivered to our farewell party cruise just barely before the ship embarked upon a tour of the St. John's River with dinner and dancing.

Two thousand four was also the year that I became the inaugural chair of the newly formed Department of Art and Design at the University of North Florida, a position I continue to hold. At the time of the 2004 conference, I was the only member in the department actively engaged with SECAC. I'm happy to report that over the last ten years eleven faculty colleagues have joined the organization. Two in particular, Jenny Hager and Scott Brown, have served as chair of the Artist's Fellowship Committee and editor-in-chief of the *SECAC Review*, respectively. They rotate off from these responsibilities this year after admirable tenures in those positions.

Every conference has had its own personality determined by its location and its director. Chairing a conference is an incredible commitment and a generous act of professional service. I admire all conference chairs and their teams, but I salute especially those directors that have organized two annual meetings, including Floyd Martin, Beth Mulvaney, and Lawrence Jenkins.

Over the last sixteen years the membership of our organization has almost doubled, and the number of members from outside of the Southeastern region of our nation has expanded exponentially to include representation from over forty states and between six and ten other countries. In recognition of this development and to accommodate it, we have added another member-at-large to the Board of Directors.

The impressive number of exhibitions and other activities by SECAC members can be reviewed in the newsletter, and the quality of books, articles, and other publications can be gleaned from the awards section of our website that includes acknowledgment for exceptional scholarship in research. Such accomplishments are also recorded and otherwise in evidence year after year in our organization's flagship annual publication, the *SECAC Review*. Perusing these lists of recognition reads like a who's who of distinguished members including Betsy Fahlman, Helen Langa, and the late and deeply missed Pam Simpson, who made SECAC one of the most important forums for the exchange of ideas and research in American art. Kay Arthur, Liana Cheney, Andrew Ladis, Bill Levin, Randy Mack, Perri Lee Roberts, and Barbara Watts have made significant contributions in regard to the art of the Italian Renaissance. Robert Craig continues to have an impact on architectural history—consistently so—and Carol Crown has organized numerous sessions about folk and outsider art, enhancing its visibility and improving its critical reception.

Awards for exhibition catalogues for both historical and contemporary materials remind us of the dynamic museum and gallery work being carried out across our region and beyond. The Georgia Museum of Art and its director William Eiland and former chief curator Paul Manoguerra have been recognized several times, as has Reni Gower for her contributions to three catalogues between 2003 and 2012. Kevin Concannon writing on Yoko Ono and Dorothy Joiner writing on SECAC stalwart Michael Aurbach have also been acknowledged in this way. And then there are the Artistic Achievement awards and the Artist's Fellowship awards.

Michael Aurbach, Hanna Jubran, Carol Prusa, Clive King, Virginia Derryberry, Bob Lyon, and Michael Warrick are just a few of our colleagues who have been recognized in these categories. Here and elsewhere, certainly, I must ask for pardon in omitting a number of equally deserving individuals.

The president's awards are very special and are the organization's most prestigious accolades, given in recognition of personal and professional development as well as longstanding service to SECAC. A number of our colleagues already mentioned—Levin, Mack, Martin, Mulvaney, Simpson—have received these. I'd be remiss not to include Tom Brewer and Tina Updike here as well. Tom has been tireless in bringing high quality sessions on art education to our meetings, and Tina founded the Visual Resources Curators Association, which has occupied a prominent place at every SECAC meeting since the late 1970s.

There are too many other friends and colleagues to mention in this brief account. For me, SECAC wouldn't be complete without seeing Chuck Tomlins and Gary Keown, both of whom are talented, smart, wise, and funny men who have lent me their friendship and support and have enriched my conference experiences. Is it any wonder that SECAC's reputation as a conference of quality and collegiality is well established and continues to thrive? Floyd Martin's formal leadership as our president is about to end, but he'll continue to offer his wisdom and advice to the enormously bright and energetic Jason Guynes, who will be joined by the indefatigable Sandra Reed as first vice-president. We all remember that Sandra mounted a highly successful conference in Savannah in 2011. The offer from the Savannah College of Art and Design to stage the meeting was first broached in 2005 in Little Rock. I remember very clearly asking Sandra pointed questions regarding the concerns some SECAC members harbored about SCAD's history regarding the treatment of its faculty. She answered with perfect poise and professionalism and without an ounce of defensiveness. I don't know anyone who works harder than Sandra Reed. She has made important contributions by organizing mentoring sessions that typify the collegiality of SECAC. Now at Marshall University, she joins one of the organization's great past-presidents, Don Van Horn. Sandra will be a fitting heir to his legacy, in 2018 becoming the second SECAC president from Marshall.

As we look back and to the future I think of Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, transitions, gates, doorways, the past and the future. Our splendid administrator, Rachel Frew, has overseen the transition from slide projectors to the digital age, from index cards, mimeographed programs, and rolodexes to Facebook, MemberClicks, and a top-notch professionally produced scholarly journal. In the next few years, we will continue to meet in the Southeast, in Roanoke and Birmingham, but it's exciting to plan for meetings outside the region in Pittsburgh and Columbus, Ohio. The future is full of promise due in no small part to the sustained efforts and countless contributions of its members, who come together for a few days in October or November to share personal and professional updates, to advance artistic creation and scholarship, and to celebrate these shining intersections of our common humanity.

My SECAC path began here in Florida and my role in its leadership concludes here in my home state. It has been a joy and a privilege to serve SECAC, and I look forward to continuing to contribute to its future. Thank you.