

Manhattan Arts

MAY - JUNE 1999

INTERNATIONAL

AGNES GUND, President of MoMA

IVAN KARP, Owner, O.K. Harris

Interviews by Donna Cameron

Artist Profiles

ROSE SIGAL IBSEN

SYLVANA SOLIGON

READ ME

Website Reviews

by Stephen Beveridge

Success Now!

An 8 Page Supplement for Artists

Raoul Dufy, *Open Window, Nice*, 1928, oil on canvas, 25 1/2" x 21 1/4". The Art Institute of Chicago. From "Raoul Dufy: Last of the Fauves", a traveling exhibition organized by the Norton Museum of Art, in Florida.

Agnes Gund

President of the Museum of Modern Art

Modern, light, with fabulous works of art displayed lovingly at a hand's reach, Agnes Gund's office located at 1 East 53 Street dances in the mind's eye. The abundance of enigmatic snapshots of her multifarious, illustrious offspring bear witness to the fact that the room's occupant isn't your typical grandmother. In fact, she is the President of the Museum of Modern Art.

As the mother of four children, Agnes Gund has successfully balanced two careers. Gund's insights into art trends in the next millennium hold singular value. Her influential work includes twenty-five years of service to MoMA, where she has been Chairman (1993-1995), before being named President of the museum. Philanthropist Gund is also a champion of Arts Education. Her work as Founder and President of the Studio in a School Association, an artist-taught program of fine art for children in 110 elementary schools and ten alternative high schools in the five boroughs of New York City, has been awarded many honors.

In the following interview Agnes Gund shares candid viewpoints on her vigorous lifelong support of the fine arts.

DC: Why did you develop and pioneer Studio in a School?

AG: I'm glad that you started with that question. It is the program that I love most of all the things that I'm involved with. We started it with a woman named Pat Hewitt who was running Joint Foundation Support, an advisory service for giving money to things that most people weren't aware needed funding. I decided, instead of giving a small amount of money, that I'd like to do a project with a bigger issue. I'd read in *The New York Times*, in 1975, when I lived in Greenwich that, because of the school budget cuts, they had to eliminate all of the Arts – and also some of the programs for gym, dance, drama and music – from the New

York City public schools. They just didn't have enough money to cover that and the other, more important academic subjects.

Well, I thought, art is *not* unimportant. It is important to me, in the entire realm of raising and educating a child – as important as any of the other subjects, such as math, reading, or history. So, we, with Georgie Alexander-Greene, who is still on our advisory board, started the program in three separate schools.



Photo credit: Donna Cameron.

I thought that all children should have the experience of making art. I also knew that artists needed the work and that they needed things like health care and insurance coverage which they didn't really have access to in any other way... One of the greatest advantages of the Studio in the School Program is that it gets the children to verbalize more and this energy spills over to other subjects...

I thought that all children should have the experience of making art. I also knew that artists needed the work and that they needed things like health care and insurance coverage, which they didn't really have access to in another way. The employment of artists is what made it so very much better than other art programs. Art was taught as a discipline, with the teacher there.

We've come a long way now. We're involved in many more programs, which are paid for by outside sources. We've sort of pioneered in early childhood, from pre-K to second grade. We involve the parent as well as the teacher in this very much looser kind of work with the children.

One of the greatest advantages of the Studio in the School Program is that it gets the children to verbalize more and this energy spills over to other subjects. The children are encouraged to talk about their artwork. They respond to their teacher's introducing the subject for that lesson. They

talk about the other young children's work. For many of them, it's the first time they've been in a class where there isn't a "right" and "wrong." For instance, "You must make the rabbit for Easter and the turkey for Thanksgiving and make it like this and you're no good if you don't do it like that..." And they use many art materials.

We also take them on field trips to museums. They have much more of an understanding of what they're seeing because they know something of how it's made. To take children

to museums and expect them to really absorb a lot of what's going on is very hard if they've never used their own hands. One of the things that we found in the Studio in the School program was the tremendous delight that children have in learning that making art could be a job. It could be something that was very different, or in their own surroundings. And that artists could come in all colors, shapes and sizes... women and men and whites and blacks and every kind of people.

DC: How do you feel about the importance of museum curators and their role in educating the public toward the artists whose work they show?

AG: I certainly agree with you about the importance of curators. I do think there are restrictions to curators, because there are opinions that one must have, no matter what breadth one might have as a curator or what background one has as an individual. They make choices. They decide whom to show, etc. Now, for example, currently there's a showing of the early drawings of Sigmar Polke, but there may not be a show of someone whom somebody else thinks is more important, pivotal or influential.

At the same time, I do think there is a real necessity for curators to work well with educators. There's that rift with educators where curators have always felt themselves superior to educators. The curators do often need the educators to do the writing of the brochures and of the different information areas that they are going to have to deal with in their presentation of their exhibitions, so these things have to balance out.

DC: In your opinion, how important is corporate support?

AG: Corporate support comes in many guises and it is very, very important to us. Our bottom line for corporate support is enormous, because we aren't publicly supported. All our money for operations comes from annual funds, which includes the corporate support and from membership and the admissions charges. I do wish that we had more exhibition corporate support. With both acquisitions and exhibitions we don't get money from the budget; we have to raise the money. And I think that it's much harder to raise money now from different corporations so, we've had to reach out for different and lower funding from corporations.

I don't feel, as some people feel, worried that the corporations are going to decree what has to go on in a given show. You have to be inventive and imaginative about where you help and how you get support...

DC: Can you tell us about the new MoMA-P.S.1 link?

AG: I do think it's a marvelous idea. I was on the Board for a few years and I feel that I know quite a bit about P.S. 1. We have to be careful that we don't impose our formalistic kind of method into doing and showing things at P.S. 1, but rather that we to allow them to be what they are.

DC: Do you have plans for a virtual gallery space on the Internet?

AG: Well, our director, Glenn Lowery has a real interest in having a parallel museum on the Internet. It may be parallel, but it will never be the same as seeing the art in the museum. We have a very good web site now, www.moma.org, considering we were late in the game in getting into this Internet business.

DC: What about creating a specific Internet gallery, in the museum?

AG: I think that's an interesting idea. They've already done some computer exhibits of things that they call art and have accepted computer art work into the collection. So it's not a question any more if it's going to be acceptable. It already is. I think that we are going to do more and more Internet and there will be someday something just like what you said – a gallery which occurs on the Internet and doesn't occur in the museum and would be considered a museum show.

DC: Any designs or projections for the future?

AG: What we are doing now is to look for other places to have exhibitions, in all five boroughs of New York City, during the time that we are partially shut down and under construction. We have found some of those venues. One of them is the Museo Del Barrio, where we would show some of the Latin American works from our collection in very fine shows and the other one is the Bronx Botanical Gardens, where we would work with sculpture outside. We are still looking in Staten Island and Brooklyn.

Our year 2000 exhibit is going to be interesting, especially in relation to this museum and how it was built, how it chose to select artists, and its bent towards western art. Especially the art of the 20th century that has, in its time, escaped what have been the traditional boundaries about what art can be! It can be merely, or it can be solidly, done. It can be brief or it can be lasting forever. And it can be made from all different kinds of materials or just out there. You go to the extreme. All art won't move directly from the studio to the galleries, necessarily, and it will be shown in more varied places – in a milieu that's very different and is very much more open to casual learning.

The museum's offsite exhibit program has also been a very strong educational tool. Especially for kids who are from projects and inner city areas. There are possibilities in that kind of open-ended work, which go even further than something like P.S. 1 does.

Donna Cameron is an artist, writer and educator. She teaches dynamic media and thesis production at The School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, Computer Arts Program. Her films and videos are included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art and are distributed by the MoMA Circulating Film & Video Library. Her two latest new technology films, "Die Honigbiene" and "The Clown" will be screened in the show "Recent Acquisitions by the Circulating Film & Video Library" at MoMA on Saturday, May 22, 2pm & Monday, May 31, 6pm in Titus II. She is a 1999 MacDowell Fellow.