

The First Annual Fine and Applied Arts Show

The purpose of this paper contains a double composition in terms of what is aimed to be discussed. The first is to regard Brorby as an individual who played an important role in the formation, or rather reminiscence of this event which has not been recorded or been made noted of. There may however be a collection of newspapers published during the sixties that may contain such information regarding the event that I plan to write about, however, not to the extent where it is written with admiration or reflection. Harry Brorby was a individual who had been a primary patron of the arts in Holland during the early sixties and later so it is not my intentions to put forth a lack of his presence in this paper. I do believe that without Brorby's perseverance in collecting such correspondence, his legacy would be merely lost and discombobulated.

Around 1957, Harry Brorby already a prominent and well traveled painter—having visited Mexico to study wood cuts (which motivated him to create sculptures out of Cottonwood found on the Rio Grande)—moved to Holland. By this time Brorby already had already acquired experience in Art, graduating from the University of Iowa with a MFA while also having studied at the Chicago Art Institute and Institute of Design. Not to mention winning a money prize in the American Art Show at the Chicago Art Institute in 1947.

Having been only thirty seven years old Brorby lived in Holland where he spent time teaching at Hope College starting around 1957. It seems that Brorby had quite a affinity for teaching: teaching summer art classes. Art lovers regarded Brorby as a man of good talent and occasionally wrote letters to Brorby asking politely that he hold more painting classes during the summer months. Not surprisingly on April 20, 1964 a show, or applied arts show if you will, was

held at the Holland Civic Center where Brorby, a member of the Fine Arts Council at the time in Holland aimed to present and teach different styles of art to the public. What is special about this show was that it was the first annual Fine and Applied Arts Show. What is more interesting is that it was unique in how it was set up. Don Rohlck, a committee member as well as a teacher in the Public Schools in the Holland Area was in charge of creating a floor plan for the art show while Joe Neve and Chris Overoorde were in charge with arranging the commercial exhibits¹. Committee members who were in charge of entires included Robert Visscher, Harry Brorby, James Loveless. Mrs. Stuart Padnos and Mrs. Paul Mcilwain were in charge of Publicity. In the Holland Evening Sentinel a column was written on the event that was to take place at the Civic Center some days before. The column read “plans call for a maze-like arrangement on the main floor, providing the unique charm of an outdoor show.” That was how “clothesline shows were meant to be held, outdoors, with works of art suspended from some sort of line, wire, or rope, sometime even tacked onto trees. Why wasn’t this event held outside, Centennial Park for instance, or one of the more larger parks located in Holland? Well, judging from the month the art show took place in and the location weather was a risk that needed not to be taken, especially when art was being showcased, or any kind of art work for that matter. The Holland Evening Sentinel remarked that the show wanted to provide “all the unique charm of an outdoor show but displaying to advantage all types of art without worrying about weather or bugs.”²This kind setup implies the more eco-friendly way of presenting art which if one thinks about it is nonetheless unique. In the same column Rohlck went on to explain “Basically, art shows fall into

¹ The Holland Evening Sentinel, Tulip Time, May 15 through 18

² The Holland Evening Sentinel Tuesday, March 12, 1963

three categories: the clothes line show, the one man group or group show, and the juried show.” So there was initiative to make the show attention grabbing. Also, the spread out layout seemed to match the potential audience which consisted of non-artists.

There were quite a few responses at the time to the show itself made by artists who presented their works, but, it was Nancy and Harrys’ responses that stood out in the *Local Observer* in April 16, 1963. Harry remarked “I feel that the artist must present a means of discovery for the viewer. In this way he does not overstate, oversimplify , or settle for superficial decoration. . .”³ This is a very interesting statement made by Brorby knowing his style of art which has been seen to be most of the time abstract. It also seems that the majority of his sets, take the *Yellow Series* for example, in which the subject matter is a set lines that enclose white while the rest—the majority—is yellow. There is no distinguishable object to be presented and making you think “what on earth is “Brorby trying to get at?” His series contradicts his statement made in 1963, but why? To answer this question, Brorby’s works, particularly his early ones compared to his latter show a reason why. Lets take one of his more early works for example, *Boy in a Paper Hat*, 1948. Although somewhat still abstract it is still distinguishable in that the subjects facial features are oriented in a rigid manner formulating shapes. *The Merry-Go-Around*, 1952, is yet another example of one of Brorby’s abstract paintings. But, like his earlier ones is still distinguishable nonetheless. However, it appears in this piece that the incorporation of more abstract style is seen. Once we get to the late sixties it is apparent that abstract painting had almost entirely captured Brorby’s interest as seen in the *The Yellow Series*. A theory for this gradual interest in the abstract may very well come from his venture to Mexico and the western

³ The Observer, April 18, 1963

portion of United States beginning in 1947. There he collected primitive art such as tribal masks, death carts, and other things of the sort. Brorby is also said to have visited Peru and New Guinea where he acquired ancient textiles and body masks. So, it would not be far fetched if in fact the idea of abstract lured the young Brorby during his time in the southern hemisphere as well as the American west.

Furthermore, the person responsible for coming up with making such an art show like the Fine and Applied Art's show is unknown, however, it is found that Joseph Moran, Chairman of the committee headed the arts show. Moran was also director of the Recreation Department, which, in fact was the sponsor of the art show. "He hoped that this first annual art show would become an annual event."⁴

The types of art that was showcased in this show included an array of art from people from Holland as well as people from out of town. The Holland Evening Sentinel remarked in one of its columns written that the show "attracted exhibitors from as far away as Flint, Cadillac, and Kalamazoo."⁵ It was estimated that about four-thousand people attended this first annual show, and assuming that was just the public. So what made this show so interesting having made four thousand people flock to Holland"? Well, I think an answer to this may be found in the title of the show, ". . .Applied Arts Show."

What was special about this show is that it incorporated not just local artists and their craft but local businesses as well, businesses such as Herman Miller and Baker Furniture, both sill prominent industries in the greater Holland, Michigan area. Business like Herman Miller

⁴ Holland Evening Sentinel Saturday, March 16, 1963

⁵ The Holland Evening Sentinel, Holland Michigan, Monday April 17,1963

took advantage of the show to present the kind of furniture they were producing. It is widely known that Herman Miller leads other furniture companies in Holland and the surrounding area with its designs even still to this day. James Lucas—an exhibitor representing Herman Miller at the time—was recorded having pointed out that “in the early days of our country the pioneers created their own ‘folk art.’ But Today,” he said, “there is no folk art as such. It is relegated to the painters and sculptors, specialists in their fields. We are farther removed from it personally both from the participant’s angle and also that of the viewer. But this does not have to be the case. Holland’s art show will give us a chance to get closer to art as a viewer, and possibly inspire viewers to become participants.”⁶ Other businesses that were present at the show included Roamer Yachts, Inc.; Kammeraad and Stroop architects; Herman Miller, Inc.; Baker Furniture Inc.; Edwin Raphael Co, Inc.; John VanderBurgh, stained glass windows; Kendall School of Design, of Grand Rapids.⁷ Having the ability to showcase such works of “art” was advantageous to not only for the City of Holland as a growing city interested in art but for local businesses that wanted to attract possible investors. “The commercial exhibits featured all type of designs from labels to stained glass windows. Boat design and fabric design were also shown.”⁸ Some days after the show had been exhibited a columnist noted in the Holland Evening Sentinel that “art is growing in Holland.”⁹ This gives us a perspective of the prominence of art in Holland at the time. This proves that an affinity for art was on the rise even for commercially owned businesses that saw art as a way to appeal to their customers. Art was proving itself as a channel not only for the

⁶ The Holland Evening Sentinel, April 17, 1963

⁷ The Holland Evening Sentinel, Wednesday April 17, 1963

⁸ Holland Evening Sentinel—Tulip Time May 15-28

⁹ The Holland Evening Sentinel, Saturday, April 27, 1963

traditional artist who wielded a paintbrush, but for the local business who wanted to make their company stand out.