

THE STATE OF  
ART GALLERIES  
AND MUSEUMS

# OUR ART GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS: WILL THEY SURVIVE?

William Hennessey, director of the Chrysler Museum of Art, Hampton Roads' flagship art institution, voices what many regional aficionados of the visual arts know to be true when he says that "the range and depth of the cultural and historic treasures in the region are surprising." Given the erosion in public funding, what is truly astonishing is that our museums, community art centers, and university and college galleries have maintained their high standards in the face of four years of debilitating budget cuts. Indeed, Crystal Warlitzer, executive director of the Peninsula Fine Arts Center in Newport News, remains confident that regional arts organizations could survive further harsh budgetary years because they are "run by creative people who will find solutions to the problems by looking at them from multiple perspectives and thinking outside the box."



**Creativity aside, diminishing budgets have significantly altered not only how often one is able to see art in the region but, more importantly, what one sees. Escalating shipping and insurance costs have made traveling shows and blockbuster exhibitions of popular styles like French Impressionism or retrospectives of individual artists like Manet or Picasso, which were so common across the nation in the 1980s and '90s, inconceivable. Virtually every institution has had to reduce staff, pare down operating hours and begin to charge admission fees in order to meet shrinking income.** From the smallest university and collegiate galleries to the largest, most venerable museums, the effects of a half-decade of cuts are all too visible.

## The Chrysler Museum of Art

Behind the scenes at the Chrysler Museum, as positions disappear in all departments, curators are piggybacking duties once held by a single expert. Jefferson Harrison, curator of European art and now of American and contemporary art, a position vacant since 2002, is planning the celebrations coinciding with the 35th anniversary of Walter P. Chrysler Jr.'s first gift of 8,000 works in 1971, a donation that led to a renaming of the institution and set the stage for its elevation to national status. The erstwhile Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences evolved from a coalition of arts organizations active in Norfolk from the 1890s. Plans for the core of the present structure date to 1933, a building project firmed up the next year with a \$45,000 grant from the New Deal's Public Works Administration and a long-promised loan from Norfolk itself, aggressively pursued by the fledgling museum's local supporters. Had the federal government not stepped up to support the cultural desires of the community, the museum would likely have remained merely its collective dream.

But it was Chrysler's donations, finally amounting to more than 15,000 pieces, that arguably jump-started a cultural explosion in Hampton Roads, creating a flagship institution for the Southside's urban center. Many of Walter Chrysler's donations, as well as

other works, have been in storage ("resting," in curatorial parlance), and Harrison plans a grand overview of these seldom- or never-seen pieces in "Hidden Treasures," to run from Oct. 21, 2005, through March 2006. Aided by the museum's other curators, photography specialist Brooks Johnson and multitasker Gary Baker, Harrison will hang Baroque and 19th-century works "academy style," a floor-to-ceiling presentation that alludes to historic methods – and points to the lack of space needed for their permanent display. The museum's 24-member Business Exhibitions Council is sponsoring this particular show, which spotlights the museum's own holdings, an increasingly common strategy for the new millennium.

In 2002, the Chrysler launched a \$40 million capital campaign, the institution's first since a 1980s expansion-related drive. Directed toward endowing operations and further renovations – the Kaufman Theatre has already benefited from the campaign funds – the new drive will aid in the ongoing restoration of the Moses Myers House, overseen by Gary Baker, curator of glass and decorative arts, more recently also curator of historic houses. The Willoughby-Baylor House, also under his aegis, is being prepared for its coming role as the Norfolk History Museum.

Andrea Barr, deputy director for development, notes that future projects for this capital fund will include re-installation of galleries to accommodate the Chrysler's world-class glass collection, as well as long-needed renovations to the conservation laboratory and a full refit for the expansive American galleries.

**Often in the arts, when federal or state funding flags, corporations have been relied upon to provide the necessary aid. But there are only two Fortune 500 firms with headquarters in Hampton Roads – Norfolk Southern and Smithfield Foods – and even when they are joined by The Norfolk Foundation's Business Consortium for the Arts, Barr still sees this as fishing in a "shallow pool." Nonetheless, she says, such external support is crucial to help establish endowments, the "self-protection" necessary to "survive the vagaries of government intervention."** In the late 1990s, the Chrysler received \$1 million per operating budget from the state, but over the last five years this support has withered. In 2004, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, the state's "cultural dispensary," doled out a mere \$55,000 to each of the region's major museums. In 2005, the Chrysler hoped – and asked – for \$500,000; it received \$40,000.

Hennessey has thus had the difficult job year after year of cutting positions, operating hours (the museum is now closed on Tuesdays as well Mondays) and exhibition plans. Echoing Barr's assessment of the situation, he says, "There is no self-justified existence for today's museums; we need to think like a business, be market-oriented, but be values-driven."

## Hampton University Museum

While the Chrysler may be the most visible museum in Hampton Roads, it is not the oldest. That distinction belongs to a specialized museum on the campus of Hampton University. Founded in 1868 as the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, the school is dedicated to the education of people of color, which has given its museum collections a unique focus.

In 137 years, the Hampton University Museum has become an unparalleled historic and artistic repository, benefiting from loyal alumni, national philanthropies like the Harmon Foundation (which stimulated the growth of the Harlem Renaissance), and Africa-bound missionaries. The collections eventually overflowed the museum's first site, the Wren Building, finding their present home when the library moved from the Huntington Building in 1997. With grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the museum's curators were finally able to install major components of the wide-ranging holdings, such as the William H. Sheppard Collection of African Art, in permanent exhibitions.



According to director Mary Lou Hultgren, **the collection comprises a unique chronology of African American art from 1805 to the present, and individual works are always being borrowed for major exhibitions. The largest such show, of painter Jacob Lawrence's twin series of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, has been circulating since 1990, supported along the way by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford Foundation.** The museum's impressive publications include exhibition catalogues and an influential journal, *The International Review of African American Art*, now in its 30th year.

Hampton University's venerable museum rests on two supports: the grantsmanship that a succession of directors clearly has exercised, and the generosity of alumni and friends. Unfortunately, this regional treasure has fared no better with state funding than have its peers among the area's institutions.

## Colonial Williamsburg

A conversation with Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's chief of collections Ron Hurst yielded information about one of the region's most popular tourist destination. There has been a steady decline in attendance at the nation's historic sites since 2001, including Virginia's Mount Vernon and Jamestown. The 1992 data for Colonial Williamsburg tallied 2.1 million visitors; by 2004 the count had dropped to 703,000. Shrinking resources at Colonial Williamsburg, a nonprofit attraction established in the 1930s, has led to the usual staff reductions, though Hurst's twin art institutions, the DeWitt Wallace Museum of Decorative Arts and the Abby Aldrich Folk Art Museum, have not faced similar cuts. The foundation provides rewarding work experiences almost unique among collections devoted to material culture, and its award-winning curators and conservators at both museums travel internationally, sharing their collections and expertise often and easily.

In October 2006, the two museums, long separated on the map of Colonial Williamsburg, will be united. The Abby Aldrich Folk Art Museum, in operation since 1957 with only 47 percent of its original donor's superb collection on view, will be attached to the DeWitt Wallace Museum of Decorative Arts, and admission tickets to both will be available at the contiguous site. An endowment campaign has raised the \$6.1 million necessary for the museums' operation, which promises more flexibility for the Aldrich's curator, Barbara Luck. She will finally be able to plan changing exhibitions highlighting the 5,000 objects that the far-sighted collector amassed before the 1920s, when the reconstruction of the Colonial capitol was but a dream of the Rockefeller family.

The DeWitt Wallace expansion will follow the Aldrich project, the two building extensions costing a total of \$16 million. Together, these collections comprise some of the best – and most often reproduced – examples of material and aesthetic culture in the country, affording anyone interested in American Colonial history a tactile grasp of its reality. Indeed, **Hurst perceives the true value of art museums to be far more than an afternoon's entertainment: "They have never been money-making institutions. Like universities, they are educational."**

## The College of William and Mary

Nearby, on the campus of William and Mary, plans for the full restoration of the school's Muscarelle Museum of Art are afoot, according to David Brashear, chairman of the museum's board. Although the museum has never actually been closed, it did endure a five-year "transition," during which both state and university support flagged. Ten budget cuts forced staff layoffs and a scramble for community funding that "went out the door as soon as it came in," leading to what the board calls the museum's "dark days." But, even during its worst period, the Muscarelle never really shut the doors that first opened in the 1980s with a small but choice permanent collection of prints and drawings from the Fred Herman collection, as well as a broad base of enthusiastic support from alumni.

The board raised the bulk of its operating funds privately, cutting that crucial part of its budget by 50 percent while seeking reasonably priced exhibitions, which ranged from \$5,000 to \$150,000, the latter spent on one special show. Alumni stepped in to aid the installation of successful exhibitions, such as the one of prints from African American artists culled from a private collection, virtually cost-free to the museum. Brashear admits that the Toulouse-Lautrec poster show cost top dollar, but its appeal made it irresistible.

A recent bequest from alumna Doris Lamberson, who left her entire estate to the Muscarelle, jump-started a new endowment fund. Her generosity will aid operations and allow the museum to hire a director to join the curator (now temporarily serving in that post as well) and to rebuild the staff.

Once new director Aaron DeGroft, recently at the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Fla., gets started, Brashear hopes to begin to build more than just staff. The board is eager to enlarge the relatively tiny museum, something that had been anticipated when it was first designed, or, as Brashear notes, "put together on a shoestring, for well under \$10 million." The Muscarelle "desperately needs larger space for exhibitions, functions and events," he adds. An auditorium would support lectures and even serve the college's art department for classes related to the exhibitions.

**Brashear is confident that some of the state funding lost to the college will be restored, opining that "the region can't afford to lose a single cultural institution." Clearly thinking of national precedents, he notes that a number of states now match their art institutions' capital campaigns, thereby endowing operations into perpetuity.** This support, which could change year by year with revenue fluctuation, builds state infrastructure and, more importantly, "responds positively to its citizenry by supporting the desires of the community," he says.

## Peninsula Fine Arts Center

The Peninsula Fine Arts Center, nestled in the confines of a vast park next to the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, has a history of providing some of the best contemporary exhibitions in the region, including biennial, one- and two-person, and thematic shows in spacious, light-filled galleries. Budget shortfalls have had a significant impact behind the scenes at the center, where new executive director Crystal Warlitrer continues to juggle staff reductions while moving toward the first balanced budget in PFAC history. Like the Chrysler Museum, the center has seen state money disappear, and what provided a third of the operating budget for years is now so sparse that little can be done with that public infusion. Funding from the Virginia Commission for the Arts used to range from \$200,000 to \$250,000 yearly, but after the millennium the state's portion dropped to \$54,000, and then plunged to \$19,000.

The center has had to replace this lost revenue by soliciting the city of Newport News and adding a mixture of community support comprising revenues from its ever-popular art classes, admission fees (the first in 40 years), memberships, special events connected to the exhibitions, and corporate grants. Warlitrer believes that the Peninsula's business community contributions are substantial enough to prove them to be "responsible corporate citizens." The center has relied upon the major shipbuilding industries, Ferguson Enterprises, Noland Corp., Canon Virginia and SunTrust, among others, to contribute approximately \$60,000 in support. Individual amounts vary from business to business, which often donate to specific exhibitions or educational programs. The center's long-standing and highly regarded biennial exhibit, which generates national recognition and brings in top critics and curators as judges, has kept the PFAC in the spotlight.

Grants also provide funding for specialized exhibitions, like the shows revolving around the art and culture of Mali, mounted in two successive years. These shows coincided with the third-grade Standards of Learning, which emphasized African nations during that biennial. The center hired a part-time curator for these, and provided free buses to special events – dance programs, crafts demonstrations and video screenings – for the Peninsula's elementary schools.

Warlitrer was forced to cut staff when she arrived at the center two years ago, a painful process that all arts organizations have experienced, since "people are the biggest portion of the budget." Yet, she remains confident that her new multitasking staff will

help “develop different ways to deliver an optimum experience” for the center’s visitors. The small admission fee may seem somewhat punitive, but Warlitrner contends that it lets people know there’s a value attached to what they choose to see. After all, she says, people pay much more for admission to movies, sports events and antique shows. This fee also has the advantage, perhaps unforeseen but surely positive, in promoting memberships, which come with invitation-only receptions at openings and other privileges, thus creating a visibly definable community. This, in turn, may well lead to future funding from grants, corporate support – and even improved state aid.

Warlitrner stresses the importance of public financing, which, she maintains, should come from the Virginia Commission for the Arts. Line-item funding from the state budget includes non-art requests from non-state agencies. However worthy, this year’s requests involving, for example, a championship horse show planned by the Virginia chapter of the 4-H and an undesignated request from the Jewish Foundation for Group Homes, have appeared to some to fall under the rubric of “pork barrel,” as state legislators jockey for pieces of the Commonwealth’s fiscal pie. Of course, one person’s piece of coal is another person’s diamond, and the nature of the political process is that influential special interests always are likely to claim their share of the pie, however worthy or frivolous their requests may appear to be.

**Disheartened by disparate line-item funding that competes with visual arts organizations’ needs, Warlitrner says, “My position from day one was that all funding for the arts should go through the Virginia Commission for the Arts, which has a better perspective on organizations and their impact in the community.”**

She goes further, stating that “when your survival is based on politics, you are only as successful as the people in Richmond consider you to be.” Operating as both the director and development officer for the PFAC, Warlitrner has had to become politically savvy, shouldering the burden of two positions and keeping a high profile in Richmond while maintaining a positive vision for one of the region’s most successful mid-size centers.

## Contemporary Art Center of Virginia

Virginia Beach’s Contemporary Art Center of Virginia evolved from one of the East Coast’s largest outdoor art shows, the annual Boardwalk Art Show & Festival, celebrating its 50th year in 2005. The center itself has grown from a small cottage near the oceanfront where local artists gathered to the expansive facilities nestled among the pines on Parks Avenue, a site nearly doubled with the aid of a \$1.8 million capital campaign. The new Rodriguez Pavilion, the first expansion since 1989, gives the center a refurbished theater, additional gallery space and room for storage and festivities. The city of Virginia Beach, which contributed \$750,000 for this specific project, always works to ensure that the center succeeds and budgets it under the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

This gives executive director L. Cameron Kitchin fewer headaches than many of his peers. He has a full-time staff of 17, admittedly fewer employees than five years ago, but growing again as the capital campaign fuels more strategic plans. The next phase, he says, will be the addition of a studio/school wing, which will be an asset to the city’s growing educational system. Since classes are already booked to capacity, Kitchin expects the city will step up as a principal source for that effort, which even now ranges from Governor’s School programs to adult classes taught by area professionals. “We have been reclassified by the American Museum Association as a ‘museum and studio school,’ a designation referring to a permanent collection amassed from Boardwalk show winners, a uniquely historical selection accumulated from 50 years of changing styles.”



Kitchin, whose tenure as executive director is relatively new, has a fresh focus on what might be termed the center's "mission." The CAC has always focused on contemporary art, and its curators have been exceptionally canny, exhibiting excellent examples of the craft arts for more than 20 years, a period when this direction became the vanguard in the art world. But now Kitchin has raised the bar, positioning the CAC "right at the forefront nationally for museums acting as town squares, where social discourse can happen." Two deliberately controversial shows, the "Home/House Project," which originated at North Carolina's Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, and Pepon Osorio's "Trials and Turbulence," brought the real-world issues of affordable housing and judicial problems surrounding foster care into the galleries during fall 2004 and spring 2005. A further pair of exhibitions, "100 Artists See God" from California, and the center's own curatorial effort, "Letters from Iraq," promise to engage viewers throughout 2005. **In sum, the city of Virginia Beach has offered "one of the most supportive situations" the director has ever experienced – a solid partnership between a sole major visual arts organization and an oceanfront community that increasingly recognizes its need for year-round cultural opportunities.**

## Portsmouth's Courthouse Galleries

Like Virginia Beach, the city of Portsmouth funds a portion of its museums, but it has turned its attention from its Courthouse Galleries on High Street, a visual arts venue, to the Children's Museum of Virginia and the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame and Museum. **A single director, Nancy Perry, runs them all, which together once employed 52 people. Attrition here has been the highest in the region, as the museums now share a mere 26 employees.** Gayle Paul, hired in 1996 as the Courthouse Galleries director, is now also its curator, building supervisor and personnel manager. Educational outreach has shifted to the Children's Museum, and the galleries' schedule of exhibitions is now funded entirely by grants, which Paul continually writes.

The Courthouse Galleries still install eight to 10 shows each year, even though the operating budget has suffered cuts of 25 percent for several years running. One show, "Winter Wonderland," a seasonal display created at a local nursery now out of business, has become a holiday fixture, largely staffed by volunteers seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. at Christmastime. Summer hours are comparable, putting a severe strain on the small staff and volunteer pool available to Paul.

Grants from the Southside's Business Consortium for the Arts support this heavy exhibition schedule, though the galleries' original focus on national contemporary art has been altered to one of historical shows, typified by Robert Knox Sneden's 19th-century watercolors of Civil War sites, curated by Richmond's Virginia Historical Society. The show was slated to open this summer. While Paul still schedules innovative artists such as those in "Flora and Fauna," a traveling show supported by grants, and continues to mix regional artists in smaller rooms at the galleries – to give what she hopes will be "a little bit of something for everybody" – she has to admit that "it's just bare bones."

## Hampton's Charles Taylor Arts Center

The situation at Hampton's Charles Taylor Arts Center is somewhat sunnier, largely because the city created the Hampton Arts Foundation in 1994, and the two organizations covered by it – the Taylor and the American Theatre – operate entirely in the black. In addition, the city's Excel Fund, created by former Mayor Jimmy Eason, funnels revenue from cable television fees to help support the arts. The city owns, operates and maintains both venues for \$1.4 million. According to Michael Curry, the director of both sites, 60 percent of the foundation's budget is raised through ticket sales and registration fees.

The Taylor's newly hired gallery manager, James Warwick Jones, who worked for many years at the Peninsula Fine Arts Center, sees a great deal of "untapped potential" in the city's visual arts community, which includes Hampton University's museum as well. The only problem he foresees with the 1925 library, which the city renovated for the CTAC over a decade ago, is space. Currently, a series of annual shows, including the Bay Days and Peninsula Glass Guild juried exhibitions, suffer from a lack of available wall space. However, Jones is opening up the second floor for expanded art classes and a large gallery, a move that

should improve the situation. **Hampton's critically acclaimed and financially successful American Theatre, already a regional magnet, attests to the city's wise sponsorship. If and when the Taylor Arts Center attains the same level of prominence, Hampton will be home to a trio of arts venues essential to the region.**

## Suffolk Center for the Arts and Museum

Hampton Roads' most rapid growth is currently taking place in Suffolk, which is responding to its new residents' desire for cultural activities by renovating the old city high school, with its acoustically perfect theater, for a new Center for the Arts to complement the smaller Suffolk Museum. The latter facility, which houses the city's Art League, has been directed for seven years by Nancy Kinzinger, who sees its future as "the other gallery" in what is becoming a destination for regional culturati. The Suffolk Fine Arts Commission has been active in seeking annual grants from the Virginia Consortium for the Arts (VCA) for the museum, whose designation refers to a small but significant collection of ephemera and artifacts from the old town's African American community. But Kinzinger has been running its programs, comprising contemporary exhibitions and classes, under the aegis of Parks and Recreation, which allots \$4,500 a year for operations. She was looking forward to moving to a new municipal department for tourism in July 2005, thereby garnering a ten-fold increase in the museum's budget. The little collection housed at the Bosley Avenue facility will likely be transferred this year to another historic museum planned for the downtown Phoenix Bank.

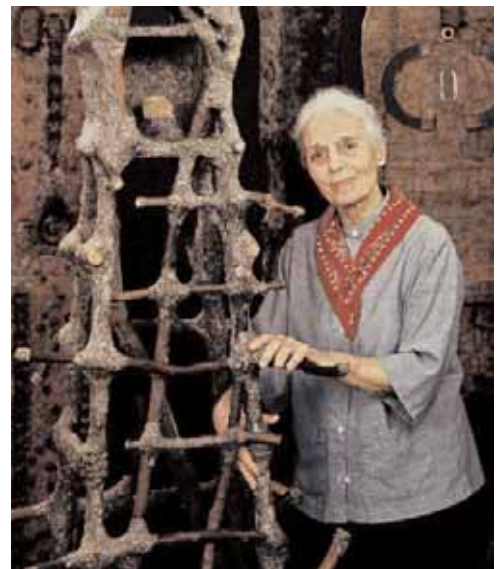
This explosion of developmental activity has altered the situation at the Suffolk Museum, which has experienced unprecedented crowds at its openings. The museum's shows are occasionally derived from exhibits lent by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, which has supported smaller statewide centers for years, but locals flock to the annual camera-club exhibitions and a single large show arranged annually by Kinzinger with the aid of grants. This year's show featured the popular work amassed by the Museum of Bad Art in Dedham, Mass., perhaps the ultimate collection of "found art" in the country, and a sure crowd-pleaser. **Kinzinger anticipates substantial growth in Suffolk's cultural scene in the coming decade, a promising outlook somewhat uncommon in the region.**

## The Smaller Towns and Counties in Western Hampton Roads

The largely rural areas of western Hampton Roads have seen a concentration of energy devoted to cultural development. Both Smithfield and the area shared by the towns of Franklin and Courtland have organized art centers: Courtland's Rawls Museum Arts and Smithfield's Cultural Arts Center.

Three years ago, the 200-strong Isle of Wight Arts League bought a stately Victorian house on Smithfield's Main Street for its exhibition and studio/class space. Five years ago, the league, privately organized in 1991 and subsequently converted to nonprofit status, retained an acting director, Kim Pugh. She set out to hire a quartet of part-time employees to augment the 15 volunteers who help install shows and maintain the facilities. The league's board of directors handles not only the gallery but also two popular music programs, the larger of which has been running for 18 summers with funding provided by the Smithfield Times.

Rick Bodson, vice president of the board, says that 25 percent of the center's income comes from VCA grants, the town of Smithfield and the Business Consortium for the Arts; one-third from memberships and donations; and the rest from retail sales in the center's shop, class fees and studio rental. Bodson reports positive figures for yearly attendance, showing a 69 percent rise, and the center





has begun the process of seeking grants from The Norfolk Foundation (a successful bid garnered \$8,000 for new climate-control and security systems) and the town's Fortune 500 corporation, Smithfield Foods.

Recently, the center has hosted such exceptional exhibitions as "Her Own Woman," a tribute to Louisiana sculptor Clyde Connell drawn from her grandson's private collection, much of which has never been publicly shown, and an exhibit featuring works by African American Virginia artist Betty Blayton, the recent recipient of a lifetime achievement award from the Virginia Consortium for the Arts. With shows like these on the year's agenda, the Smithfield Cultural Arts Center has "earned the right to 'ask for the order' " from Smithfield Foods, says Bodson, explaining that the term is business jargon meaning "sign on the dotted line" – for a very good cause indeed.

The Rawls Museum Arts offers an enviable model for development, serving two towns in a picturesque corner of Hampton Roads as yet untouched by suburban sprawl. The museum has received funding of \$10,000 to \$15,000 per annum from Southampton County and a similar amount from Franklin, which has two-and-a-half times the population of Courtland, its home site. Executive director/curator Leigh Anne Chambers is a dynamo, having garnered matching governmental grants for the museum's 1999 expansion, which added 1,800 square feet of gallery space that the Rawls had long needed. She also convinced the Camp Foundation, associated with the region's chief corporate entity, to give the museum \$20,000.

In addition, Chambers has established an annual fund, with corporate sponsorship of exhibitions beginning at \$300 and rising to \$1,000, a level that includes free rental of the facility. Last year, these rentals raised an extra \$3,000 for operations, and she expects that sum to increase in 2005. Chambers has worked the system, writing a matching grant from The Norfolk Foundation to fund study in arts administration at New York University, a strategy that has paid off for the Rawls. She learned how to emphasize the educational value of art when speaking to businesses about potential support, particularly relevant for a rural community whose access to facilities is minimal.

Alternative funding methods, such as facilities rentals practiced by practically every national institution from the Metropolitan Museum to the tiny Rawls, and the art auction with its raffle tickets and competitive bidding, are strategies that any director should be able to implement successfully. Middle- and high-school workshops have been supported at the Rawls by a number of local corporations and even by the Cameron Foundation in faraway Pittsburgh. **Chambers manages, in just two galleries, to mount a series of 14 to 16 shows a year featuring photography, sculpture and a juried exhibition, a schedule that many of her colleagues in larger centers would find daunting.**

## Old Dominion University

The Southside's two public universities maintain galleries connected to the activities of their art departments. The most visible, on 21st Street in Norfolk's Ghent section, belongs to Old Dominion University. Started 25 years ago as an improvisational space rented by faculty members on Granby Street in the city's Brambleton district, the gallery was moved to its present location in 1999 in order to establish a community-centered venue devoted to contemporary art. The goal was to complement the Chrysler Museum. Art department chairman Robert Wojtowicz credits the university's support, along with an endowment created by the sale of works from the estate left by photographer and former art department faculty member Wally Dreyer, plus a pair of funds dedicated to visiting artists, for the continuing success of the gallery. Its curator, who also serves as an arts properties manager for the university's diverse collection, mounts 10 shows per year with a budget of \$10,000, a sum established by the dean of the College of Arts and Letters.



The Governor's School for the Arts, which contributes to this budget, usually has a spring exhibition, and the remainder of the year-round schedule is devoted to one- and two-person shows by national artists, thematic exhibits, student competitions and shows curated or suggested by faculty members. **Wojtowicz is cautiously hopeful that a regular line-item budget will replace the current one, especially after the gallery moves, once again, to campus in the new University Village complex, a relocation planned for 2006.**

## Norfolk State University

Norfolk State University's small Wise Gallery, managed by faculty, hosts nine shows per academic year. Its dedicated line-item funding is culled from the art department budget, but current director Shinedu Ocala hopes more substantial support will come from a shift to putting the gallery under the administration's aegis. Faculty recommend most exhibitions mounted at the Wise, though several are connected to the joint graduate program that NSU runs with Old Dominion. But, unlike the larger university's off-campus gallery, which has regular hours of operation, the Wise is open only upon request, a stricture that reduces its attendance and impact.

## Tidewater Community College

Tidewater Community College, whose downtown Portsmouth facilities are entirely dedicated to the visual arts, runs an on-site gallery with shows that complement its schedule of classes. Curator Shelley Brooks organizes six shows per year, ranging from faculty and student exhibitions to thematic ones incorporating work by area professionals. Funded by the college at approximately \$10,000 per year, the gallery is able to extend its programming into the summer months, when shows often coincide with programs at the nearby Children's Museum of Virginia. Local art historian Rhonda Deussen has paired with Brooks to plan a series of panel discussions, studio visits and gallery talks for the coming season's slate, which includes a retrospective of long-time TCC art department chair Ann Iott's career, and "9 x 9," an exhibition of contemporary prints.

Current chair Ed Gibbs, whose colorful digital work filled ODU's gallery last year, is confident that Brooks will provide the region's artists and viewers with the best of Hampton Roads' current creative endeavors – and that the college will provide the necessary funding to do so.

### ASSESSMENT AND CHALLENGES

It is clear that after decades of steady growth, the vitality of Hampton Roads' arts institutions has faltered as severe budget cuts have eroded their ability to continue the thorough programming of exhibitions, visiting artists and educational classes once readily available. Yet, through capital campaigns and grantsmanship, many of these institutions and smaller centers have expanded their facilities during the lean years. Even so, buildings may have grown larger, but neither personnel nor exhibitions have kept pace with this architectural explosion; nor have any of these venues been open to the public as long or as often as they once were. The lights are out for too many days, while admission fees are rising rapidly. Most sobering of all, the shows have gradually become smaller and less diverse.

Despite all these negatives, however, each of these institutions holds classes for children and adults that often fill up as soon as they are announced. These educational programs, many of which support the national Standards of Learning dictates for arts and cultural instruction, offer our children the promise of lives enriched by constant connection with the visual aspects of an increasingly globalized culture.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we have contradicted much of this promise by diminishing the financial support necessary for our regional art organizations to provide such opportunities. In recent years, we have observed a classic example of the oxymoronic notion "We want you to maintain or increase our services, but at the same time lower our taxes."

Alas, we have found we cannot do both in the current fiscal climate. Consequently, arts and cultural institutions have sustained deep cuts in the financial support they receive from the Commonwealth even while the overall state budget has increased more than 10 percent per year.

"It's all a matter of priorities," some would argue, and that is true. **The blunt truth is that many of our elected leaders have, by their actions, placed a rather low priority on funding the arts and cultural institutions even though their rhetoric might suggest otherwise. Burgeoning state tax collections in recent years have been accompanied by truly discouraging cuts in public support for the arts and culture.**

Hence, must we rely upon the "shallow pool" of corporate sponsors and generous private donors to step in when our tax dollars don't stretch past the demands of our congested highways? **We put our cultural heritage at risk and diminish the quality of our lives if we do not take advantage of human creativity found in our artistic and cultural institutions.** As the PFAC's Crystal Warligner has observed, innovative artists and their supporters often find "ways to get around" the roadblocks placed in their paths. We are fortunate that we already have in place some impressive artistic institutions. Peter Sander's "Cities Ranked and Rated" (2004) gives the museums of Hampton Roads a rating of 9 (out of 10) when the average city or region's rating nationally is only 6. One wonders, however, how long we will be able to maintain this rating if public support for the arts continues to decline.

The visual arts are vital components of our social organism. A healthy regional community can be brought to experience its historic values, its present concerns and its brighter future through the open doors of arts institutions. Widen those doors and the community of greater Hampton Roads will enter.

#### ART GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS PHOTO CAPTIONS

- Chapter Cover William Henry Johnson "Jitterbugs (M)" (1941-42) COLLECTION OF HAMPTON UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
- Page 68 Pierre Auguste Renoir "The Daughters of Durand-Ruel" (1882) COLLECTION AT CHRYSLER MUSEUM OF ART
- Page 69 Henry Ossawa Tanner "The Banjo Lesson" (1893) COLLECTION OF HAMPTON UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
- Page 72 Ginny Ruffner "Creativity: The Flowering Tornado" CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER (fall 2004)
- Page 74 Signature photo from the exhibit "Her Own Woman: Clyde Connell" SMITHFIELD CULTURAL ARTS CENTER (May 25-July 3, 2005) photo by Martin Vandiver
- Page 75 Alexander Anufriev "The Angel of Moses" (2005) Old Dominion University Gallery (spring 2005)