

Editorial COMMENTARY

by Tom Starland, Editor and Publisher

On Our Cover This Month

On our cover this month is a work by Clyde Butcher, part of the exhibition, *Clyde Butcher's America the Beautiful*, showing at the Upcountry History Museum in Greenville, SC, through May 25, 2025.

Acclaimed photographer Clyde Butcher has spent more than 50 years capturing some of America's most unique and beautiful landscapes, from the Redwood forests of California to the Everglade swamps of Florida. Butcher majestically captures the public natural lands set aside by the Federal and State governments for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. Read the article on Page 11.

Trump And The Arts?

So our dear leader has taken charge of the Kennedy Center so it gets back to representing the real artists in America. I guess he wants to pay tribute to stellar artists like Kid Rock and Ted Nugent. He's making PBS and NPR do away with DEI - there goes Big Bird and *All Things Considered* - get ready for *Elon's Chopping Block* (a children's learning show about funding) and *All Things MAGA*.

I guess the National Endowment of the Arts will be run by Eric Trump. Why not? It won't be long before he's (dear leader) sitting at his desk signing one of those decrees that from now on all art will be a reflection of him - in a positive light only - like those cards he sells to his followers.

If you're an artist who thinks politics is too messy or too below yourself to be involved in, well you get what you get - and don't pitch a fit!

If you are one of those who says they don't want to read about this kind of stuff in an arts publication - don't read it, you don't normally anyway, and don't download a copy, and you sure as hell shouldn't be sending us anything to be included in it. Hey You! Get off of my cloud!

What You'll See On Facebook

The other day I was scrolling down my feed in Facebook when something unexpected came up - a post promoting the State Art Collection, managed by our SC Arts Commission. Wow, did my blood pressure kick into high gear. I should have passed it by, but I just couldn't, I had to see what this was all about.

Did you know South Carolina has several art collections? The SC State Museum has one and the SC Arts Commission has one (sort of) but I guess the Arts Commission's collection is probably held at the SC State Museum - that is, what's not on the walls of the Arts Commission's offices and on loan to other State facilities. The chances of the public seeing much of this collection is slim or none or every other blue moon, as the Arts Commission has provided no space to put its collection on view to the public - like a SC (State) Art Museum, much like they have in North Carolina. I added that little inside joke as the SC Arts Commission always says its policies are in line with other state art agencies, but in many cases they are not - they are more helter skelter.

So I'm going to put what I found at this site promoted on Facebook in regular type and then some insights I've made over the years in italics. Here we go:

The South Carolina State Art Collection, 1967-2020, Managed by the South Carolina Arts Commission

Info about this collection can be found online at (<https://www.southcarolinaarts.com/direct-programs/state-art-collection/>).

Curated by a committee of knowledgeable art enthusiasts (like Wim Rolfe, Jeffrey Day, and David Huston), the South Carolina State Art Collection (SAC) serves as a time capsule, representing the historic importance and cultural vitality of the visual

arts in South Carolina from 1967-2020. Containing 466 works by 288 South Carolina artists, the collection serves as an educational tool to help promote the state and its cultural resources and to encourage creativity and support the artists of South Carolina.

First off, I don't know how they think this collection does any of those things in that last sentence. OK, in the past this selection committee was made up of artists who selected other artists to be in the collection and then members of the committee would go off the committee and new members (some of the artists selected to be in the collection) would get on the committee, to return the favor and select works by those former committee members to be in the collection. It was a "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours later" system. A lot of folks in this collection were college and university art professors and some of their favorite students. As I was once told by one of these professors, "Who else should be in the collection, but us?"

Well, I would think you would find works by Jim Harrison, an artist voted the most popular artist in SC, during a SC Arts Commission survey, but he's not. He was given the Order of the Palmetto and an honorary doctorate degree from the University of South Carolina. For what? I guess his contributions of art. Don't know that he did anything else to get those awards. But, his art is not worthy of being in the Commission's collection. Or take Elizabeth O'Neill Verner, an artist from the Charleston Renaissance period. The Art Commission named its highest award after her, but she doesn't have one work in the SC Arts Commission's Collection. She was also very popular with the public. They now call the award the Governor's Award.

I challenge you to go check out the list of artists in this collection and see if you know who they are and are not struck like me, more about who has works in and who is not or has very few works in this collection. I know there are probably a lot of artists in SC who think they are somebody, but not by looking at this list. I know I've done this arts publication for 38 years and a lot of the names on the list are not that active, if they ever were. Some were only here as an adjunct professor for a few years and moved on to the next state to get that state's awards, but they have works in the collection.

Artwork Loans

The South Carolina Arts Commission (SCAC) encourages loans to advance public understanding of the rich and diverse history of the arts in South Carolina, and to enable a wider audience to see and enjoy the State Art Collection.

Up to five (5) works of art from the State Art Collection may be loaned to qualified State institutions for one (1) year. The State Art Collection will only be loaned to South Carolina state institutions* that are open and accessible to the public. Artworks must be displayed in public spaces. (*I left out a lot of the boring requirements to get these five works.)

How many days or hours do you spend in SC Institutions? Not many I bet, and if you were there to get your driver's license, pay your taxes, or visit a state representative to lobby them about something - did you check out the walls or did you spend most of the time looking at your watch or your phone? Every blue moon the Arts Commission puts together an exhibit of just a few of these works and shows them in some art facility, but you can't see even half of the collection or a quarter in any one place. The best works will probably be out on loan - somewhere. South Carolina needs a state art museum.

New Acquisitions

continued above on next column to the right



Escala
acrylic on canvas
48 x 24 in.

VICTORIA
PRIMICIAS

PrimiArt.com

The South Carolina Arts Commission is not currently accepting submissions to the permanent State Art Collection.

You would think by this statement and their headline (1967-2020) that no new works have been added since 2020. But is that right? A Charleston artist and gallery owner, Nina Liu, and another anonymous donor, established The Nina Liu South Carolina Arts Commission State Art Collection Fund in 2019. What's been happening with that money? And, where did the money come from to buy all those works of art for 53 years and what happened to that funding source. Why have they stopped adding to this collection? Artists in SC didn't stop making art.

State Art Collection Recognition Award

To ensure the State Art Collection remains a relevant and contemporary footprint of South Carolina's cultural heritage, the SCAC will begin in FY27 (July 1, 2026) to induct up to five works of art from each year's cohort of fellows into the SAC.

So the artists scratching each other's back system is gone and now they will obtain art from the Fellowship winners each year. That's not much of a change, the Fellowship game is another - who's in this year and who's out of favor with the Arts Commission. It's all politics. Is the collection a footprint of the state's artists or the SC Arts Commission's opinion of what that footprint should look like? The Arts Commission has always put their foot on the scales of what is and what's not to be considered "good" art in SC. Shame on them and shame on us for letting them do it.

This recognition award brings works by contemporary artists into the State Art Collection as a part of its digital archive. The SCAC will not own or physically house these works.

OK, this is a real puzzle. The statement, "The SCAC will not own or physically house these works." Does this mean they

are no longer buying physical artworks - just digital copies of works by the Fellowship winners or what? What are they paying for digital copies? There's a lot of smoke and mirrors here. If so, what are they doing with The Nina Liu Fund and is that for the collection? Will no other artist get their physical artwork in this collection? I've heard of the day the music died, but is this the end of visual art in South Carolina?

Now you might be thinking, Tom you need to get some answers out of the Art Commission and I'm saying, I've wasted enough of my time trying to get the truth out of those folks over the years, so go do your own asking - if you care. Most won't as there is no SC Art Museum, so they are not missing out on anything but some cash, and any good artist can just sell their work to the general public. Jim Harrison and Elizabeth O'Neill Verner did, and are still doing it long after their deaths. Besides, the folks at the Arts Commission are what I call wordsmiths. They can bend the truth like metal with the words they use. And, if you don't ask the right questions - they don't volunteer answers, even though they know what you want to know.

I can hear my doctor now, "Tom, let it pass, let it pass, it's not worth it".

Well Doc, there are some things you just can't let pass without saying something. This art collection was maybe a good idea at first, but after a number of years when no facility was planned to house and display this collection, it should have been stopped and what they had already collected transferred to another non-profit arts facility - if anyone wanted it.

From the beginning there was no curator involved to make sure purchases represented a real artistic footprint of the art being created in South Carolina at any one time. And the selection committees had no focus other than making sure their friends and colleagues made it in so they could later be selected by them. In the past they had to hire a big name curator to put shows together and justify the works being presented. As time marched on the concept of having an art collection became nothing but a big

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