Valentine Art Auctions

As we celebrate our Heart R Art exhibition this 60th year, many have asked about the history of the Valentine Art Auctions. Rumor has it that it was Sabra Clark's idea and that it was the very first Art Auction with art donated by real artists held West of the Mississippi.

At any rate, Sabra was the Chair of the first Valentine Benefit held **February 6, 1982** in the Rosemont Pavilion. Valentines were exhibited in Baxter Gallery the week before to rev up interest and sell even more tickets. The artists who agreed to participate were sent Dax frames so the valentines arrived already framed and ready to be hung.

As stated in the October 23, 1980 minutes, "The purpose of this new benefit is to focus on the importance of Los Angeles in contemporary art and to develop an audience of collectors by exposing them in an exciting setting to local artists and their work."

As always with the PAA, lofty ideals lead to great parties and this was no exception. The Valentine theme was carried out in the mood of the 1930's and 40's with décor and clothing limited to mirrors and the colors red, black and white. The Ray Anthony Orchestra (famous for "The Bunny Hop" and "Hokey Pokey") was engaged for $5,000.   Caterers were Dennis and David from Two's Company in Burbank. Cost per person was $100.

We haven't found a list of art or artists so we don't know how many pieces were sold, but the Patron Donations

brought in $17,000 and the art sold for $26,000 and *Artifacts* states that $43,000 was netted. In addition some of the valentines were later made into a poster and note cards and sold around the country.

The next Valentine benefit was held **February 11, 1984** at the Caltech Athenaeum and entitled "An Affair of the Heart." Kaholyn McKissick was Chair. Cocktails and the silent auction were held in the lounge and dining room, and dinner and dancing were in a large tent. Clark Keen's 10 piece orchestra played from 9:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. Cost per person remained $100.

We again don't know who the artists were, but there were 107 of them. And the art was displayed at Baxter Art Gallery from Feb. 7 to 10, with bid sheets. We couldn't find any financial figures, but the patron categories were Pacemakers, Heartbeats, and the top level at $1,000 … Heartthrobs.

Things REALLY got ambitious in1986. As reported by Mary Lou Loper in the LA Times on Feb. 2, 1986, "As a salute to Pasadena's Centennial, the Pasadena Art Alliance has named its third Valentine benefit dinner dance 'My Heart Belongs to Pasadena.' Co-chairmen Lois Boardman and Kathy Gillespie decided to stage the party at the Tanner Car Barn and Stable in Old Pasadena on February 15. There, more than 70 important contemporary Southern California artists would show off works created especially for the benefit – artists such as Peter Shire, Roland Reiss, and Alexis Smith. … But first the art will be exhibited for a week at Polytechnic School's new Garland Theater and Fine Arts Center. Silent bidding began there and was completed at the party. Also at

Polytechnic, the Alliance is hosted an artists' reception and a symposium on creativity featuring printmaker June Wayne, Dr. Albert R. Hibbs of Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and Melinda Wortz, chairman of the UC Irvine art department."

There were also docent tours for children in Garland. Jack Smith reports in the LA Times, "I fell in with a group led by Peggy Phelps. They were looking at a painting that showed a darkening heart sinking into waves. 'What do you suppose that means?' asked Phelps. 'Her heart is drowning.' said one of the girls, evidently associating a drowning heart with being female. Good guess. The work was by Helen Pashgian and it was called 'She Stepped Into the Pool With a Sinking Heart.' AND a colored catalog was published with explanatory text and an image of every piece of art. Tickets were $125 and it netted $75,000.

But alas, that was the last of the Valentines. No more bidding your heart out! The 1988 auction was held May 4th at Art Center and was entitled "Spring Spree."