

AGAINST CENTRALIZATION

From 1951 to 1954, the society was headed by Wheeler Williams, who since 1957 has been president of the American Artists Professional League. Both groups strongly oppose any centralization of Government art activities.

In a leaflet called "War Cry," the league declares, "We must continue our battle to see that art is not socialized under political bureaucracy."

The society and the league remain firmly aloof from groups like the Committee on Government and Art, and the National Council on the Arts and Government. These have backed legislation pointing toward a permanent advisory council for the arts.

According to Adlai S. Hardin, president of the National Sculpture Society, "The minute there comes a [Federal] bureau with a capacity to advise, some freedom is going to be dissipated."

The Committee on Government and Art, founded in 1948 and made up of representatives of 12 national organizations, including the younger and less influential Sculptors Guild, declared in a statement of principles on May 25, 1956:

"We believe that governmental art policies should represent broad artistic viewpoints, and not the predominance of any particular school or schools.

"In order to aid in making available to the Government the best experience and knowledge of the art world, we believe that there should be advisory bodies composed chiefly of professionals in the respective fields; and that art organizations in these fields should have a voice in nominating the members of these bodies."

SEVEN FIELDS REPRESENTED

The National Council on the Arts and Government consists of individual representatives of seven major art fields. In general, it has been aligned with the position of the Committee on Government and Art, whose chairman is Lloyd Goodrich, of the Whitney Museum.

Government art collections, which symbolize the Nation's official interest in the preservation and formal display of accrued treasures, include the National Gallery of Art, the National Collection of Fine Arts, and the Freer Gallery.

In his invaluable "Government and Art," Prof. Ralph Purcell writes that it was not until 1906 that the Government began its role as a collector. He notes that when the British burned the Capitol in 1814 the only two paintings owned by the United States—gifts of Louis XVI—were destroyed.

In 1906, a group of paintings known as the Johnston collection was given to the Government by Harriet Lane Johnston, niece of President James Buchanan and mistress of the White House during his administration.

The condition was that the small but valuable collection should be placed in a National Gallery of Art, when one was established. Professor Purcell recounts how a "friendly court action was instituted to determine if the art collection already in the Smithsonian Institution would legally constitute a National Gallery of Art."

The court ruled that it would. Thus the early Smithsonian collection, enhanced by the Johnston gift, was newly constituted as the National Gallery of Art.

Oddly enough, the art in the Smithsonian was to lose that title after all. In 1937, when the Mellon collection became the Nation's foremost, the title was transferred to it. The National Gallery of Art now comprises the original Mellon bequest and subsequent additions.

The Smithsonian art was renamed the National Collection of Fine Arts. It is the art that is to be housed in the old Patent Office Building under the recent legislation. Pending settlement in its new home, the National Collection has about 500 portraits and pieces of sculpture on loan to public buildings, including the White House and the chambers of the Chief Justice.

The Freer Gallery of Art, devoted principally to oriental fine arts and the works of Whistler, was the gift of Charles L. Freer in 1906. The gallery was not built until 1920; and the collection was opened to the public as a unit of the National Collection of Fine Arts. The Freer Gallery is administered by the National Collection, of which it is considered a unit, and does not have a separate board of trustees, like the National Gallery of Art.