

'Gift from sky' was Sheldon gallery's beginning

By Carla Engstrom

Sheldon Art Gallery's genesis was a "gift descended out of the sky totally unexpected," according to Norman Geske, director of university art galleries.

The gift made in 1957 came from Frances Sheldon, a member of the Nebraska Art Association (NAA) who bought art for her home, Geske said.

"No one anticipated she'd leave \$1.5 million with the stipulation to buy university housed art," he added. Sheldon's donation was part of the Sheldon Bequest, which included her brother Bromley's gift of an additional \$1.5 million.

The bequest was used to construct and design the building, sculpture garden and grounds. Presently, the bequest is "well over" the original \$3 million dollars "because of investments" and still is being spent on upkeep and repairs for the building and grounds, he said.

Expensive repairs

Sheldon Gallery has the "disadvantage of being a very special building" with expensive repairs, Geske said. The building was designed to be "a work of art itself," he added.

Geske has been Sheldon's art director since its opening in 1963. He came to Nebraska in 1950 and started as assistant director, was acting director for three years and became director in 1956.

Geske said his interest in art "goes all the way back to my years in high school when I realized, with the help of a good teacher, that I was probably not going to make it as a professional artist.

"This teacher drew my attention to the museum field as an alternative choice. So when I graduated from high school I went to the University of Minnesota to study the history of art, with the idea of working in a museum," he said.

"It provides contact with works of art and provides contact with artists," he added.

Geske received his masters degree in the history of art from New York University in 1953.

In a general sense, Geske said, he's the one who decides what art will go into the gallery. But in a specific sense, he said, he works with the Art Gallery consulting committee.

Three duties

The committee has three duties. It gives advice in matters of policies, accepts or rejects gifts and gives approval of purchases.

As director, Geske said it's "my function to recommend or not recommend a gift." Sheldon's collection is "primarily, but not exclusively, a collection of American art of the 20th century," he said.

Sheldon's spending funds "average about \$30,000 a year," he said, and about \$20,000 of it comes from the Endowment Fund, a gift from Mr. and Mrs. F. M. Hall. It goes to the NU Board of Regents and is held in trust by the National Bank of Commerce, Geske said.

This may make "our operation look rich. Well, we

aren't," Geske said, adding that \$30,000 bought a lot of art 20 years ago, but not today.

The Halls left their entire estate, including their house and investments, the main source of the money, he said. The money is "only for the purchase of art objects," Geske added.

Geske estimates the appraised value of the collection owned by the university and the NAA is \$4 million to \$5 million. The highest priced art object in the collection is a sculpture purchased for \$60,000, according to Geske.

Commenting on the gallery's budget, he said there has been "no significant change for 20 years. I understand the primary function" of the university is teaching.

Sheldon's annual budget is about \$100,000 which pays for salaries, utilities, maintenance and a "minimal amount of programming," Geske said.

"But on the other hand it seems to me we are making a substantial contribution on behalf of the university," he added.

However, 90 per cent or more of the money is gifts from the public. A large part of the financing comes from NAA, but Sheldon "enjoys a good relationship with the university," Geske said.

Concerning his philosophy on art, Geske said, "there is somebody in the world for a statement every artist makes."

arts and entertainment



Photo by Kevin Hagle

Norman Geske, Director of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

Films

Small Change emotional without being sentimental

By Will Huffman

In the film *Small Change* (currently at the Plaza 4) French director Francois Truffaut has accomplished a very special achievement—he entered and inhabited a child's mind. The result is a film that is both marvelously understanding and touching.

Small Change has no plot. It merely follows the lives of a group of children, portraying the day-to-day occurrences with a straightforward simplicity.

Never gushy or sentimental, Truffaut's film manages to capture the child's uncluttered view of life.

Truffaut doesn't patronize the children but treats them with great respect, sympathizing with their problems and sharing in their joys.

Constructed as a series of incidents, the film moves along at a leisurely pace. There are no great climaxes, yet it leaves the viewer with a quiet feeling of peace and enjoyment. It's as though Truffaut were able to transport us back to our own childhood at a time when things were simpler and happier.

Not one-sided

However, the film doesn't present an entirely one-sided view. There is the

young boy Julien, mistreated and abused by his mother, reminding us of the darker side.

Fortunately, most of the children in *Small Change* lead happy, secure lives, where the greatest trauma is a young boy's first kiss.

The non-professional cast of kids is uniformly first-rate and even the adults in the cast do a fine job, though they take a back seat to the young stars.

The special magic of *Small Change* can best be summed up in one scene where a toddler attempts to rescue his kitten from a window ledge several stories-high. In an excruciating moment, the infant topples and falls. As the stricken bystanders scream helplessly, the young child lands softly in a hedge, unhurt and with a smile on his face. Here Truffaut confirms the belief that God truly does protect the innocent.

The film is emotional without being sentimental, and sympathetic without ever becoming coy or cute.

Expression of optimism

Small Change is an experience to be savored as a true and deeply felt expression of optimism, a rarity in these downbeat times.

A different type of uplift is offered by *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (currently at Douglas 3).

Peter Sellers is in top form once again as the bumbling Inspector Jacques Clouseau, a role he has played three previous times.

Like the earlier *Panther* films, this is a deft mixture of wit and good slapstick. Clouseau bumbles his way through a series of sight gags and pratfalls that will please the most ardent physical comedy fan. But, in the best tradition of slapstick, even

though the gags are violent the participants emerge unscathed.

Herbert Lom returns as Chief Inspector Dreyfus, recovering in a mental institution from his previous clashes with the infuriating Clouseau.

When Dreyfus is again pushed over the brink of insanity after encountering Clouseau, the plot takes off on its wild zigzag course, eventually involving deadly assassins, beautiful counterspies and, of all people, Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger.

Likeable and infuriating

Typically Clouseau emerges from the ensuing wreckage with his naive composure undisturbed. Sellers' portrayal of Clouseau makes him both likeable and infuriating; his ignorance is frustrating but he is too preposterous not to be loveable.

Writer-director Blake Edwards moves the film along at a brisk pace, using glamorous people (Omar Sharif appears in a cameo role) and lush settings making the trip enjoyable.

Edwards' direction is so self-assured (he directed the three previous *Panther* films) that he underplays a sequence most directors would build into a big effect—an attempt on Clouseau's life by an assortment of the world's best assassins during Munich's Oktoberfest.

Best of all, however, is the animated credit sequence. Here the film pays tribute to movies in general, with special bows to Lon Chaney's *Phantom of the Opera*, Alfred Hitchcock, Julie Andrews (Edward's wife) in the *Sound of Music* and Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*.

The Pink Panther Strikes Again is lightweight, enjoyable and well-crafted comedy at its best. Not all the gags hit the mark, but the ones that do are more than ample.



Photo courtesy of National Screen Service Corporation.

An unsuspecting lady bather is the target of these two junior peeping Toms in Truffaut's film *Small Change*.