

# Worth the Wait

## Ackland brings culture with re-opening

By RANDY BASINGER  
Arts Coordinator

When the Ackland Art Museum re-opens its renovated doors to the public, students will have their first opportunity to see the museum's interior and its collection of artwork since the \$3 million renovations began three years ago.

The museum, located on Columbia Street, was originally intended for Duke University. When William Hayes Ackland, the museum's namesake, died in 1940, his will specified that his entire estate was to be used to construct a memorial art building and to acquire objects for exhibition. Duke was to be the beneficiary of the Ackland bequest, but the school rejected the gift, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill fought a legal battle for the next six years with Rollins College in Florida before being awarded the bequest.

All told, the University received \$1,300,000, plus an accumulation of interest. The Ackland Art Center was constructed at a cost of more than \$800,000 and opened its doors on September 20, 1958.

The museum remained open until September 6, 1987, when it closed for

the renovations that, while not extending beyond the original foundation walls, have nearly doubled its space for showing art. Despite the expense of the renovation project, Dr. Charles Millard, Ackland director, said the buying power of the Ackland had not been hurt.

"The funds for the renovation were allocated by the University specifically for that purpose," Dr. Millard said. "The money I need to raise now is for the operating expenses."

The main floor of the Ackland houses eight galleries for viewing European and American paintings and sculpture from the last six centuries.

The second floor contains a study center for the museum's collection of works on paper, storage areas, conservation facilities and a large gallery for changing exhibitions selected from the more than 10,000 prints, drawings and photographs in the Ackland collection.

"The important paintings, sculptures, everything will be on exhibition," Dr. Millard said. "Works on paper are a different category. (They) are very sensitive to light, so they can only be shown for a short period of time. We will show a small percentage of those works in the upper gallery, so that over a large period of time a

large volume of these will be shown." Joe Lucchesi, a student intern at the museum, said, "This (upper) gallery shows the range and depth of the exhibition."

The Ackland's famous works include Eugene Delacroix's "Cleopatra and the Peasant," which will appear on the cover of the new Chapel Hill phone book. This work was one of the many cleaned and restored while the museum was closed.

During the renovation, the museum also received "Theta Beta," a 9-by-21 foot painting by American abstract artist Morris Louis. The painting was the gift of Louis' widow, Marcella Brenner, and holds a major place in the museum's Charles and Isabel Eaton Gallery for 20th Century art.

"We are deeply grateful for Mrs. Brenner's generosity," Millard said. "Theta Beta' transforms the Ackland's collection of contemporary art. For the first time, the museum will be able to show a major example of American color abstraction."

In July 1986, Millard became the fourth director in the Ackland's history and immediately took on the \$3 million renovation project. With the re-opening, Millard, an expert on contemporary art and 19th- and 20th-century sculpture, will oversee the

museum's collection of more than 12,000 paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, photographs and pieces of decorative art, as well as its 18-member staff.

"I think the way the museum develops depends on how the members of the staff respond to the expanded spaces and to their own imagination and desires for programs," Millard said. "It is a group effort and the shape the Ackland takes will be given by the staff."

Millard said he is interested in pulling in more of the community now that there is a building to bring people to. He even hopes to bring the power of the exhibition to the state as a whole.

"I would like us to reach all the people we can," he said.

Ray Williams, curator of education, said: "We have always run small-scale exhibitions of the permanent collections that can be used by the departments (at the University). We are interested in having temporary exhibitions to support teaching courses."

"If you are involved with a student organization and wanted a tour, we could arrange that," Williams said. "If an RA wanted to arrange for a dorm hall tour, we could arrange that. We want people to have a greater aware-

ness of the Ackland as a community resource."

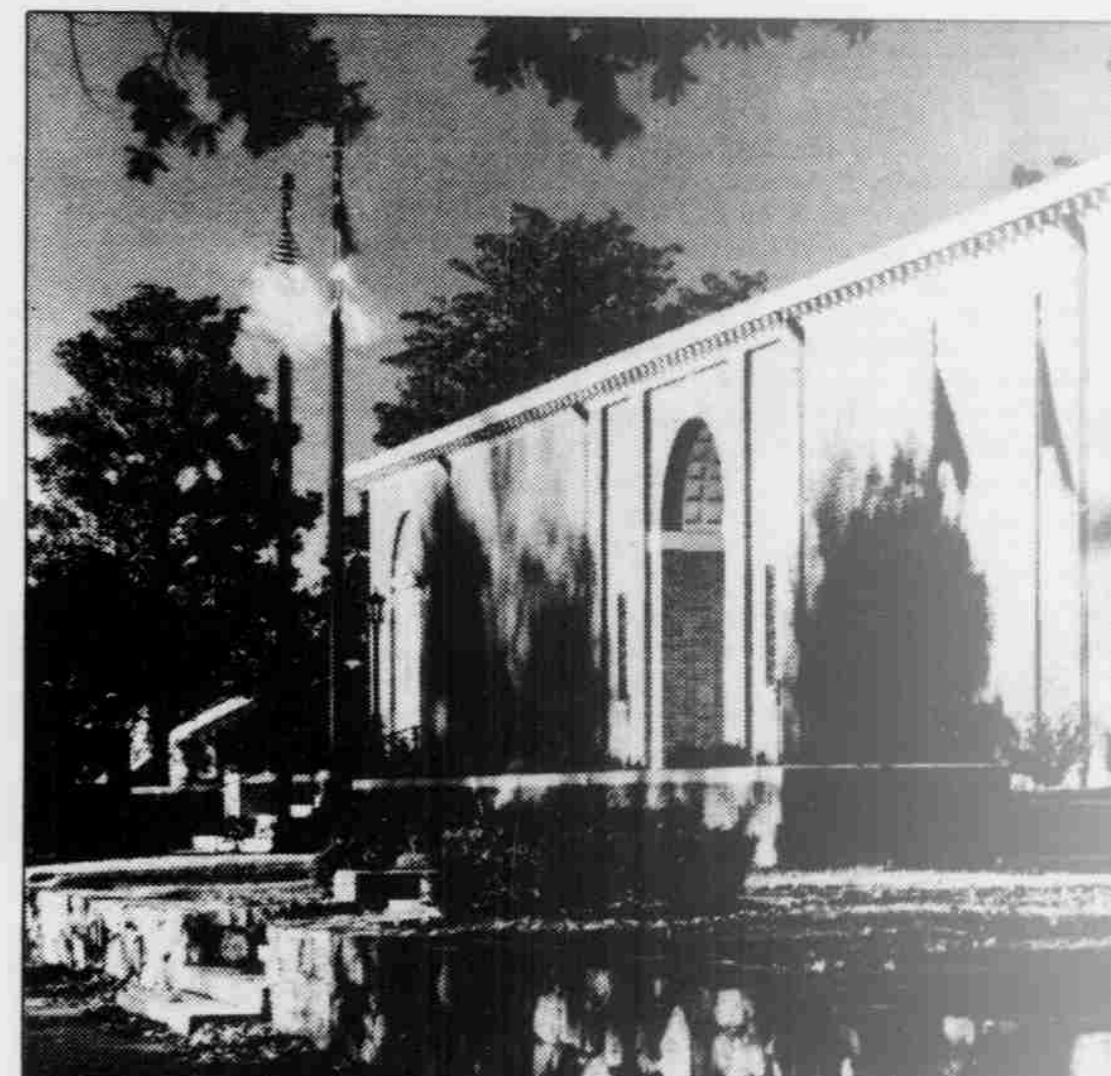
To achieve this, the museum will expand its educational programs, promoting activities like a Saturday morning story hour for children and their families twice a month.

"The story hour will use picture books and stories to better explain pieces of the museum's collection," Williams said. "For example, the Ackland has a new dragon sculpture from Thailand that we might introduce with an Asian story about a dragon."

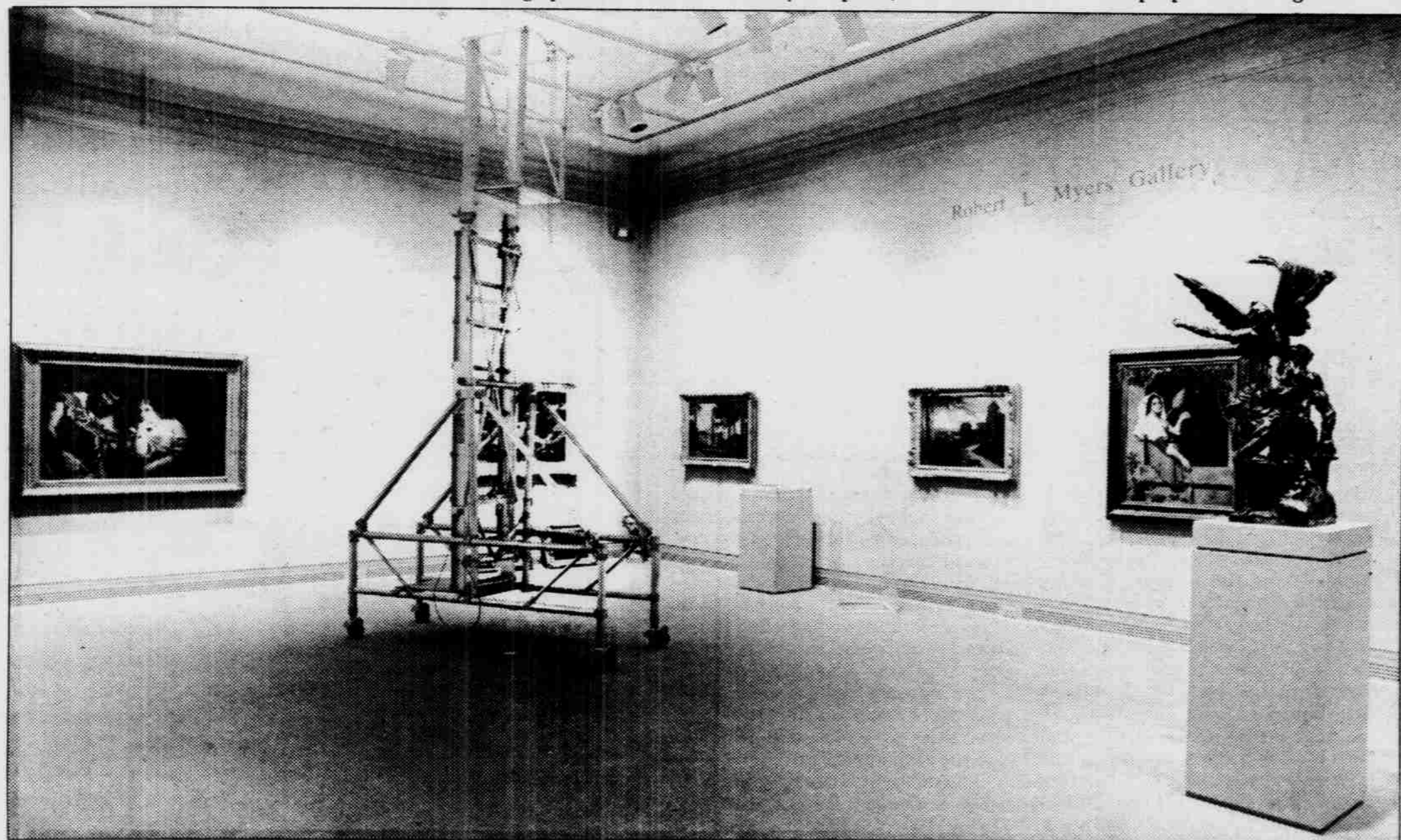
In addition, the Downtown Commission's Arts at Lunch series will be held at the Ackland twice a month and the museum is organizing a Young Associates membership group.

"This group is for people who want to learn more about art, be sociable and have fun," said Laura Kreps, an Ackland volunteer staff member who is helping to organize the group. "We should probably call them the Ackland Young-ish Associates, since the age range is from 'twenty-something' to 'forty-something.'"

With the reopening ceremonies just around the corner, the Ackland Art Museum is poised to become once again a force in Chapel Hill's art world.



Yes, you've seen it, you've driven by it, you've walked past it, but now you can see it. The Ackland Art Museum. If you've read anything on this page, you might have figured out the many years of being closed.



Special to Omnibus/ David Minton

The Robert L. Myers Gallery of Nineteenth Century Art is one of the eight galleries on the main floor of the Ackland Art Museum. 'Cleopatra and the Peasant,' by Eugene Delacroix, on the far left, is one of the most famous pieces in the museum. You can also see this painting on the cover of the new Chapel Hill phone book.

## Gallery debut breathes life into a

By ISABEL BARBUK  
Staff Writer

The Ackland Art Museum, located on Columbia Street, represents the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's own display of "serious culture." Closed since 1987 for renovation, it re-opens this week as a facility for students and the community alike.

It contains a large section devoted to European art, and in March will open galleries devoted to Ancient Greek, Roman, Asian and Oriental works. Basically, the Ackland's major premise is to give a broad view of art through the ages.

The gallery is divided between two floors. On the upper level is a rotating exhibition devoted to drawings. Like the rest of the gallery, the works are displayed on a chronological time scale, beginning in the 16th century and working up to the contemporary. The pictures incorporate a variety of media, but utilize primarily pencil and ink. Of particular interest are the 17th- and 18th-century sections, which illustrate the influence of the classical image on artists of these periods.

Unfortunately, the earlier works tend to be somewhat drowned by their frames. Delicate pencil drawings, minutely detailed, tend to disappear

when surrounded by heavy gold.

Some aspects of the contemporary section are interesting, in particular the attempt to get away from preconceived notions of modern art. However, one wonders why they chose to display some of these prints over others. The pictures vary greatly in quality, yet the gallery has a collection of more than 10,000 drawings, prints and photographs from which to draw excellence.

This section of the gallery relies on intimacy to draw the viewer in. Unfortunately, the somewhat close atmosphere means the pictures lose some of their power. The impression one gets is that of entering a library rather than an art gallery — studious rather than inspiring.

Downstairs, eight galleries are devoted to painting and sculpture. This too is ordered chronologically, but is also divided by country. This is commendable, as style in art revolves around certain schools of thought. Consequently, 17th-Century Dutch art has its own distinctive quality, but hardly resembles 17th-Century French art. Perhaps the Ackland should also look at subdividing the upper gallery drawings as well.

The journey of art through time starts with a short look at the Middle Ages. These works incorporate largely

religious themes and a lot of gold. Wisely, the gallery swiftly moves into the High Renaissance and 17th-Century art. This section is full of wonderful Baroque paintings with vibrant colors and considerable power.

A divided gallery continues the journey. One wall is devoted to Dutch 17th-Century art, the other to the French and Italian 18th Century. This mixture works surprisingly well, with the puritanical and sober aspects of the Flemish works juxtaposed with the overly-romantic 18th-Century pictures. Works like "Venus Disarming Cupid," by Jacopo Anigani, demonstrate the neo-classical learnings in art of this period. The picture's soft lines and muted colors are romanticized, idealistic and pleasing to the eye.

The 19th-Century Robert L. Myers gallery more flaunts than simply illustrates the Ackland's ability to purchase major works of art. Among its artifacts, it counts two superb samples — "Cleopatra and the Peasant" by Eugene Delacroix and "The Call to Arms" by French sculptor Auguste Rodin.

The Delacroix is a fine example of his work, excessively vivid in imagery and lurid in color, a powerful picture of an intimate scene. The Rodin — an early work commemorating the

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