

O N A R T

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Of all New York City's many great and near great museums, the Whitney is dearest in the hearts of most contemporary artists, critics, and dealers. Everyone has a vested professional interest in this Museum which specializes in American art, in modern art, and even in contemporary art. Few museums can offer opportunities like the Whitney can for living artists combining instant recognition with a super-prestigious establishment.

The Whitney is also, because of its accessibility to contemporary artists and its mandate to collect American art, the prime object of

mediate speculation. Her credentials are excellent and she's not really involved with emotionally charged issues. She may or may not greatly advance the popularity and prestige of an already great American artist. Her work will most likely affect the Hopper market—advance the value of his paintings by enhancing the value of his reputation. But it doesn't hit us where we live.

The appointment of Patterson

catalogued several private and public collections, and taught art history prior to her appointment to the Whitney in 1968; Barbara Haskell had a B.A. in art history from UCLA, and had been curator of Painting and Sculpture, and later Director of Exhibitions and Collections at the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art prior to her appointment at the Whitney in 1975.) By comparison, it hardly seems that Sims' experience at O.K. Harris

himself professionally, but I had nothing to do directly with his appointment. I knew nothing about it and was not consulted." When asked if there was a search committee for the job, Donald LaBadie, Public Relations Director at the Whitney, speaking for Mr. Armstrong commented, "That's the Whitney's business!"

Maybe. But insofar as the Whitney is a non-profit, tax exempt organization which enjoys con-

portunity.

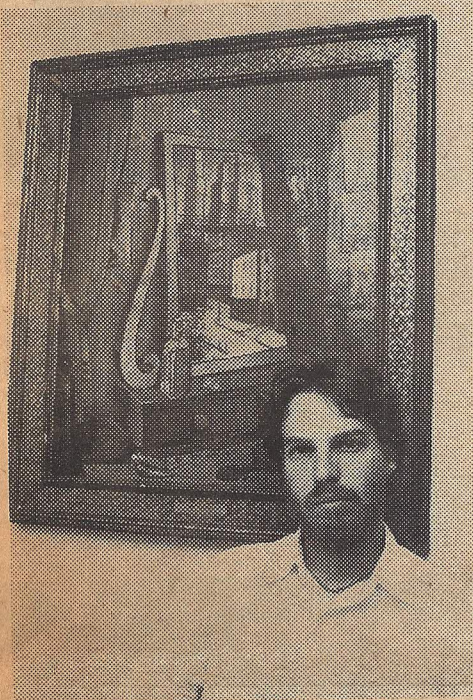
The Whitney may be a privately endowed institution but its use of public monies and its powerful position over the development of contemporary art demands its acknowledgment of its responsibility to the public. Irresponsible judgment, political favor swapping, abusive leadership have no place in an institution of such magnitude which functions not only as a repository of the glories of the past but as an active participant in the glories of the present and the shaping of the future.

Sims himself is aware of the delicacy of his situation and quite frankly admits he does not go forth onto the field fully armed. His evaluation however is optimistic, choosing to view the Whitney as adventuresome and willing to take a chance on something different rather than to view his appointment as merely the string attached to a quarter of a million dollars. Since Mr. Armstrong was unwilling to back Sims' assertion, that remains to be seen.

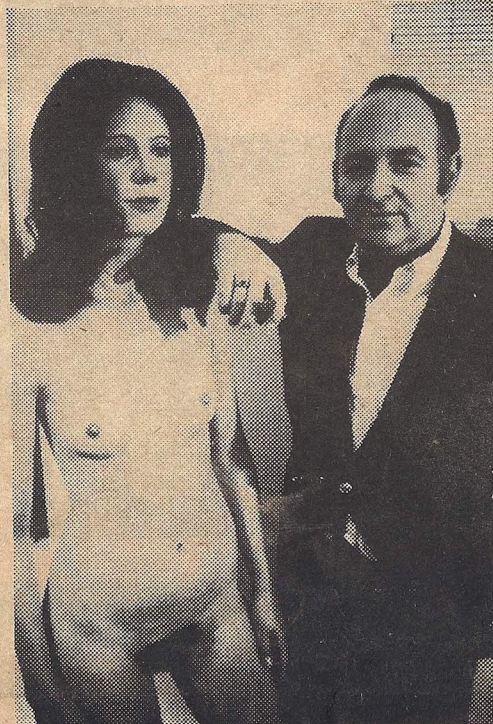
Sims reminds us that acquisitions will not be made by him alone but by the cooperative efforts of himself, Armstrong, Tucker, Haskell, and the acquisitions committee. Sims insists that his wide-ranging interests and vast visual experience with contemporary art while at O.K. Harris for six years will serve the Museum and its constituents well.

It is rumored that some dealers are disgruntled with Sims' appointment, worrying that the Sims-Lewis-Karp trio will control Whitney acquisitions. Some dealers, on the other hand, see the appointment as a move in the right direction, emphasizing the im-

Does the Whitney Have a Scandal?



Patterson Sims: Doesn't know who recommended him.



Ivan Karp: "It was a complete surprise to me."



Tom Armstrong: "No Comment!"

Photos by Alan Tanenbaum

controversy, criticism, and complaint within the art community. Its every move is examined, scrutinized, and questioned. It is one of the first to be challenged in its sensitivity or callousness, its relevance or irreverence, its awareness or unresponsiveness to issues, aesthetics, or current art politics. It is the Artists' museum—and the darling of collectors, dealers, and patrons.

Thus it is assumed the Whitney has enormous power in manipulating contemporary American art and aesthetics. With such power and such a following of artists comes great responsibility—not only for the collective members of the institution but for the individual staff members who, whether in a real or imaginary sense, guide the destiny of so many and so much.

Recently the Whitney hired two new associate curators and received two major grants. Dr. Gail Levin, age 28, has been charged with the care and development of the large Edward Hopper collection, recently funded by a \$150,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation.

Levin earned a Ph.D. in art history from Rutgers in May, 1976. Among other previous experience, she organized an interesting exhibition this spring at the Museum of Modern Art, *Morgan Russell: Synchromist Studies, 1910-1922*.

The success or failure of her work with the Hopper Collection will be seen in time—probably in 1980 when a major Hopper exhibition and catalog *raisonne* is scheduled. Although of great academic interest, the Hopper collection and Dr. Levin's appointment does not attract much im-

Sims does—at least as far as some artists and dealers are concerned. Unlike Dr. Levin, or the other major curators at the Whitney, Marcia Tucker and Barbara Haskell, Sims has stepped into a very powerful position in a great museum without the usual credentials.

Sims has been appointed associate curator of the permanent collection, a position which will not only give him the responsibility of what the Whitney already has but what it will acquire. At this point ears perk up, eyebrows raise, artists and dealers get restive with anticipation—money, fame, investment values, and—oh, yes! contemporary aesthetics, are now involved.

Just who is this lad who suddenly snatched the plum? How did he do it? One thing is certain, if HEW were involved with Museum hiring the way they are with California universities and Tom Armstrong (Director) and Howard Lipman (President) had to certify that they had selected the best qualified candidate from an advertised, national search, Sims wouldn't be it. National search—no way; credentials—not exactly!

Sims, age 29, went to work for Ivan Karp as Assistant Director of O.K. Harris immediately after he graduated from college. He has no previous museum experience; no art history degrees; no major catalogues to his credit. He has seen a lot of contemporary art. Otherwise he has little to prepare him to operate on the level of experience and background with his fellow curators (Marcia Tucker had a M.A. in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts, had

was a proper training ground for developing the permanent collection at the Whitney, which has long been neglected and requires astute and knowledgeable work to bring it into a meaningful focus.

Coincidentally, the Whitney received a huge unprecedented grant of \$250,000 for the purchase of works by living American artists for the permanent collection, from two Virginia collectors, Frances and Sydney Lewis. Coincidentally, Sydney Lewis was an original backer of Ivan Karp's O.K. Harris. Coincidentally, Patterson Sims worked for several years and will continue to work for Sydney Lewis, as his agent to acquire contemporary art for Lewis's personal collection, already enormous and varied. So many coincidences suggest some manner of connection between Sims' appointment and Lewis's grant. Was Sims, unqualified in all the conventional ways, hired as a condition of Lewis's grant?

We inquired of Mr. Sims and Whitney personnel as to how he was selected. According to Sims, he did not seek the job, but rather was approached by Tom Armstrong. He was not interviewed by a search committee nor by the Board. Sims claims not to know who, if anybody, recommended him. When asked if Sidney Lewis recommended him, Sims insisted Mr. Armstrong be consulted for that information.

Tom Armstrong's response to the question was, "No Comment!" Mr. Lewis was unavailable for comment. Ivan Karp replied, "It was a complete surprise to me. I knew Sims was looking to advance

considerable public funds from The National Endowment for the Arts and The New York State Council on the Arts, it strains our sense of the Whitney's responsiveness to the public trust to refuse the public knowledge of its activities and methods, especially those that fall within the realm of employment which is clearly governed by law to protect the public interest and individual rights to equal op-

portance of involvement with contemporary art over experience or degrees.

Sims' first exhibition from the permanent collection is scheduled for February, 1977. He will organize two exhibits to be shown in French museums in 1978. It bears watching.