

Finding Art

It's her job to place local artists in the state's home—THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION

By Stacy Booth

Artist, art historian, lecturer, curator and art collector: Beverly Criley Graham has held all of these titles during her career, both on the East Coast and in the Pacific Northwest. She now puts all those skills to work as the Art Committee chair and curator at the Governor's mansion in Olympia.

Beverly says she has been interested in art for as long as she can remember. Her career started at age 13 when she was accepted into New York City's High School of Music & Art (now the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts). Beverly says in addition to encouragement from her own family, her apartment

building was also home to a second mother who was an artist and encouraged Beverly in her passion. "Going to Music & Art was probably the most fortuitous because it was art on a college level. Right from the time you got there, they expected you to perform as if you were an art student in college. It was rigorous and the academics were rigorous."

After high school Beverly moved on to study with a number of artists including William Cumming, one of the members of the Northwest School. Cumming would reenter Beverly's life years later when she brought his work to the Governor's mansion exhibit. In addition to

her studio painting work, Beverly earned a degree from the New York School of Interior Design and had her own design firm in Bellevue.

With all of that, Beverly says she is most proud of her undergraduate and graduate work at Yale University, which she did years later. She was one of the few during her time there who did not attend right out of high school. Beverly graduated cum laude with a bachelor's degree and dove right into her master's program. "I wouldn't suggest that to anybody," she says. "I think everybody needs a little rest in between."

After she finished at Yale, Beverly moved to Seattle to the home she and her family had purchased while her husband, John, finished his last year as a chief financial officer before retirement. She says she wanted to teach and received a job offer to teach on a daily basis. "Here I had a husband who was finally free and we could finally do things," she says. "I thought, 'Do I really want to commit to something that is every day?'" Beverly turned down the job—and was quickly approached to become part of the Governor's Mansion Foundation, where she still works today.

The Governor's Mansion Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization that maintains all the artifacts in the mansion. Beverly's job as curator is to seek out and purchase art for the permanent collection, as well as put together an exhibition once a year of artwork created by someone from and



featuring content about Washington state. Beverly has been with the mansion since 1989, serving first as an art committee member and now chair of the committee and curator. She says she has helped purchase eight paintings, which joined other paintings in the permanent collection that are placed throughout public areas of the mansion, two guest rooms, the guest bath and a hallway in guest quarters.

The permanent collection at the mansion requires pieces to be from the turn of the century, about 1880-1930. "We like to think that there wasn't anything going on out here as far as art was concerned, but it's not really true. There were a lot of art schools, a lot of women doing some very, very fine work." One of the most prized pieces in the collection is a portrait of George Washington created by Rembrandt Peale. Beverly says it came onto the market at the end of 1998 and as assistant curator for the mansion, she traveled to New York with permission to bid up to \$100,000 for the painting. It sold for \$250,000. "We came back very disappointed," she says. "We weren't back very long before the man who bought it said that he hadn't understood (at the time of the auction), but he had found out we were actually interested in it for the Governor's mansion. He thought it was such a great home for it, that's where it really belonged, and he'd be willing to sell it to us for what he paid for it in the bidding." Five months later, the foundation had raised enough money to buy the painting and it now resides above the fireplace in the mansion drawing room.

For Beverly, part of the appeal of art is the stories behind it—stories about the artist or about what was happening in the world when the piece was created. "I never thought until I got really deep into art history that I cared that much about history. You find that you cannot study art history without knowing what is going on politically, financially, militarily, socially—all those things—because they impact so much on art."

The exhibitions at the mansion are changed each June—this month the new installation features John Goodwin, a member of the Makah tribe, who creates prints about his culture. Beverly enjoys this part



of her job because she says she likes all art and the non-permanent exhibitions allow her to feature art created outside the 1880-1930 time period required for purchased pieces. The art Beverly finds for the exhibitions can come from everywhere. She says she always has her eyes open, because she never knows what she'll find. A few years ago, for instance, Beverly says she was in Dr. Andrew Cole's office in Bellevue and noticed a beautiful silk-screen print in the waiting room. Looking around, she realized the office had a number by the same artist. The reception desk had a flyer with the artist's information, and from that, Beverly administered an exhibition by the artist, Martino Hoss. For Martino, the timing of the call was perfect. He had just lost his studio in Pioneer Square after the 2001 earthquake and his mother had also recently passed away. "It just touched me that my phone call to him had meant so much because of the timing," she says. "It's serendipity. You never know."

When Beverly isn't telecommuting or in Olympia, she and her husband enjoy traveling and spending time with their family—they have four children and five grandchildren. She and her husband have been members of the Club since they returned to Seattle in the 1980s, using the Club for special events and the Hotel as a place for family to stay. "This has been a wonderful relationship," Beverly says.

For Beverly, the timing of the position with the Governor's mansion was perfect, and ever since she has loved her job. She says although she loves art, she does not feel the need to collect it at home, instead giving priority to art that is very personal. The curator position allows her to explore what Washington state has to offer the art world and help give local artists a home in what Beverly calls the state's home: the Governor's mansion.

ABOVE Beverly helped bring this portrait to the mansion.
LEFT Beverly with artist and exhibitor Martino Hoss.