

Dedication of the Falk Gallery

"ACRES OF DIAMONDS"

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There is a legend concerning a wealthy Persian farmer who deserted his fruitful lands to wander in search of fabulous wealth in mythical diamond fields. He roamed for many years until finally, aged and discouraged, he died an unhappy pauper far from home. Not long after, the fabulous diamonds, acres of them, were found on his own land.

Using this legend, Russell H. Conwell, founder of Temple University, a people's university, created a speech known as the "Acres of Diamonds" speech which he delivered 6,000 times. After each presentation, some worthy student received a check from the money raised to continue her or his education.

As a graduate of Temple University, I have chosen to borrow Conwell's metaphor to describe our own mining of acres of diamonds on our own land at CNC. Russell Conwell said, "Your acres of diamonds are not in far distant mountains or in yonder seas; they are in your own backyard if you but dig for them." And he was right.

In giving you a brief history of the art program at CNC, I want to give special attention and praise to the many, many individuals, diamonds from our own fields, who have brought us to this day, this joyous occasion when we dedicate our exquisite Falk Gallery.

In 1971, CNC had one art history course taught by Sr. Benedict Donahue from Hampton Institute. We had no slide collection and so she used her own, mostly slides of Vatican art. With charm and enthusiasm, Sr. Benedict Donahue planted the first seed. In 1973, we offered our first studio art course taught in a regular classroom without equipment.

BUT in 1974, the fireworks began. Dean Thomas Musial asked me to start an art program and gave permission to hire a full-time art professor, and President James Windsor gave us a space, half of the old "chili parlor." First, some words about our first full-time art professor, Dr. Stuart Van Orden. He was a humorous and impertinent man, in addition to being a fine artist and scholar. We loved him from the moment we got his letter of application. It began this way: "I am your minority candidate. I am 58 years old, a full professor at Eisenhower College, and a member of the largest minority in the country, the aged." We hired him and never regretted it. His vision and hard work enlarged the program and set it in the right direction. We had an art minor program the next year, and we became degree granting in 1977.

Now...about the old "chili parlor." That was our food service area, housed in the place that is now the gallery and the dean's office suite. It was one large room with tables and chairs, loud talk, and a lot of smoke. In one corner was a small triangular cooking area, less than 10 square feet in size. In it worked Mr. Takis, Mrs. Takis, and their son, flipping hamburgers, dunking fries in a vat of fat. Students stood in line hollering, "Hamburger... Pepsi...hamburger." And the three-person work force echoed, "Hamburger... hamburger...Pepsi" like characters from Saturday Night Live. The most popular professors on campus at that time were those who dismissed five minutes early so their students could be first in the long line.

So the old "chili parlor" was divided in half. Mike Cezares, who was our one-man maintenance staff, got one half and we got the other. An empty room. But President Windsor gave me \$264, and Mike Cezares built in some cabinets and shelves. Then I cashed in all my chips and went about campus begging, borrowing, and stealing tables and chairs. It was another year or so before we could afford two easels; later we bought a second-hand kiln.

So it began. And here we are now. Along the way, we have had extraordinary work from our regular teaching faculty and our loyal and devoted adjuncts. Let me tell you about them.

One of our first adjuncts was Jack Clifton who taught Life Drawing and Life Painting. He is an extraordinary artist, and a man of some reserve. He told me that he would teach the courses, but that I would have to get the models. That was the year I became acquainted with go-go dancers, women of fine form but with unusual work habits. Someday...not today...I may tell you about the year with the go-go dancers!

David Alexick joined us, first as a half-time professor, then full-time. He became Director of Art when Stuart Van Orden left, and he kept a steady course until this year when his other interests grew and he turned over the director's job to Jon Petruchyk. Jon is a remarkable showman who has built the art history classes to soaring enrollments while maintaining his success as an artist. Jon recently had a solo exhibition at the Peninsula Fine Arts Center, and his work is hung in their "Tributaries" show presently.

Betty Anglin is our talented and devoted part-time professor; that is, she has a part-time contract but works for us about 50 hours a week! Betty, too, has recently exhibited at the Peninsula Fine Arts Center as well as other galleries in the state and the south-eastern region.

Our list of adjunct specialists is long, and we are fortunate to have the richness and diversity of their talent. Lee Montgomery, Supervisor of Art for the Newport News Schools, teaches Crafts. Lee's work has been exhibited in galleries state-wide including the Virginia Museum. Ken Bowen introduced our courses in Computer Graphics. You will have an opportunity to see some of his work in our faculty show. Lefty Majher, whose own work is very strong, has strengthened the vision of our painting students. Judy Peter and Rochelle Weber have taught drawing and design for us; they are both accomplished artists. David Roach has taught etching courses and brought his students to an outstanding degree of accomplishment. Charlene Engel, whose work is seen frequently in local shows, taught for us, and we are proud of her accomplishments. Tony Shiver is presently teaching our three-dimensional courses, and it is fitting that his contribution to the faculty show is three-dimensional.

These are our diamonds, mined in our own back yard, as are our students, most of whom came from the local area. And to these diamonds, we add the jewels, Emmanuel and Jean Falk, who have given so generously to both music and art at CNC. Our old "chili parlor" would never have become a gallery of elegance without their help. Every time I pass or enter the Falk Gallery, I will think of them and send silent and vibrating thank-you's. All who walk here will know their names and understand the beauty of their gift and spirit.

Now, what will we do with the gallery? We will continue to mine the acres of diamonds on our own land. Of course, there will be shows brought in from far away for your pleasure, but there will also be continuing emphasis on our own, our student shows, our faculty shows, exhibits of the work of artists from our own area. There are many who deserve recognition and those golden moments under the track lights. Please join us as the exhibits change.

William de Kooning observed, "What I see becomes my condition." Art shows us not only what is and what has been but also what can be...possibilities, realities as yet uncreated. A gallery is a place where new directions and new visions are brought into being, and through these we can grow to a fuller life. Mark Rothko called studio sanctuary. A gallery is also a kind of sanctuary for the best that we as human beings have to offer in the way of visual culture.

It is fitting, I think, that the new gallery has been established on the site of the old primitive art studio where much learning and inspiration has already taken place. The gallery marks a real turning point and a giant step forward for the Department of Arts and Communication and for the life of the College.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the value of the gallery as an educational resource on our campus.

This is a grand and glorious day for me, and it has been my privilege to speak of our acres of diamonds, all those who have made art an important part of our College and community life. I give thanks to those who have labored, and I offer our sincere gratitude to Emmanuel and Jean Falk for this living and exciting reminder of their love and generosity.



Christopher Newport College

50 Shoe Lane
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May 16, 1989

Dr. Rita C. Hubbard
7 Willis Drive
Newport News, VA 23606

Dear Rita:

I want to thank you for sending us a copy of your remarks at the May 7th Dedication of the Falk Gallery. We have requested copies of the program from Lynda Whitley and will include these with your remarks in the College's archives. We are particularly interested in adding materials that shed light on the College's history, so we are especially grateful to have a copy of your speech. We appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wendell".

Wendell A. Barbour
Library Director

cc: Mary Daniel w/ archival materials