

In Search Of Lost Art And Women Artists

By Christina Cronin Southard

Dr. Connie Koppleman is searching for women artists of Long Island. Not just any artists but women artists who belonged to a Port Washington cooperative gallery in the 1970s called Central Hall.

According to Koppelman, a social historian, Central Hall was the first women's cooperative gallery on Long Island. The idea came from a wealthy patroness named Sonia Matkovic, who started the gallery in a loft space on the corner of Main Street and South Bayles Avenue in the rear of the building that Arena Sports Center presently occupies.

"It happened at the height of the women's movement," said Koppelman. "These women were raising their families but were dedicated artists at the same time. They did not have the time to run into New York City. They were extremely talented." According to local artist, Paul Wood, who was precluded from joining because of his gender, "Matkovic spent about \$50,000 renovating the building opposite Inspiration Wharf and moved it there sometime in the late 70s or early 1980s." Sonia Matkovic was one of his students who loved art but was not as talented as many of the people she benefited. "She and her husband, who was some kind of shipping magnate, fled Yugoslavia during World War II." He remembered that in the early 1980s her husband, Ivo, renovated the old Hopkins mansion on Port Washington Blvd. (just northeast of St. Francis Hospital), built several new homes on the property and lived in the mansion themselves. He be-

lieves that Sonia is alive and well and living in Florida.

The reason why Matkovic is key to the Stony Brook exhibit is because instead of collecting rent from the artists who rented her space, she accepted their paintings, amassing quite a collection. According to Rita Katz, a former member of the cooperative and a member of the Port Washington Library Art Advisory Board, "Central Hall was the most elite gallery on Long Island. Their shows were marvelous." The problem was that it was so elite that many felt the gallery was elitist, particularly men. "The opening was well received by *Newsday* and even *The New York Times*," she said. When the Nassau County Museum of Art opened, a lot of women exhibited there and they were accused of being elitist as well," said Katz.

In the early 1980s, the women involved in the co-op decided to move to Soho. According to Katz, they were successful there as well and many of the artists then retained agents and the coop just died."

Koppelman, who is planning the show for March of 1996 needs to gather the body of works by December of this year.

Many of the area artists have been located such as Betty Holliday, Stephanie Brody Lederman and Wendy Ehlers Ward. The artists who have not been located nor any of their works are: Joyce Stillman Meyers, Jane Magus, Susan Scharf, Suanne Weisberg, Marilyn Doller Blum, Kathy Ferguson, Nancy Goren, Maxine Hayt and Doris Lanier. The following artists, according to Koppelman, are deceased, but she is interested in locating their works: Monique De-



An 80" x 84" work of Shirley Gorelick, one of the most famous artists of the Port Washington art cooperative, Central Hall, which was located on the corner of Main Street and South Bayles Avenue. Dr. Koppleman is looking for the artists who were members of Long Island's first select women's cooperative and their works for an exhibition.

cant, Jane Lutnick, Gisele Fischer, Marjorie Atter McKezitt, Ilise Greenstein and Rachel bas-Cohin.

If anyone knows the whereabouts of these

artists or their works, contact Dr. Koppleman at 751-4461 or write her at Women's Studies Program, SUNY Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York 11794-3456.

Where do you turn?