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Kate Gardiner/Daily News photo

Artist Howard H. Newman, left, unwraps his sculpture 'Torso #1,' last week after a crane placed it in position in front of the Newport Art Museum's Cushing Gallery. The generosity of Maureen Donnell of Newport and Palm Beach, Fla., kept the sculpture from departing Newport. Above, Nicole F. Markham, International Tennis Hall of Fame collection registrar, stands next to a late 19th century or early 20th century tennis racket press that she considers the most unique gift the hall of fame received this year.

# Gifts enrich city institutions

■ With little or no budget for acquisitions, Newport's museums depend upon the generosity of philanthropists to strengthen their collections.

By Janine L. Weisman  
Daily News staff

Local artist Howard H. Newman had mixed feelings when he broke the news to the Newport Art Museum last summer that a gallery in Palm Beach, Fla., wanted to show his 1986 sculpture "Torso #1."

The 500-pound, headless, legless bronze artwork had been on loan to the museum since 1997, when it was placed at the end of the driveway facing across Bellevue Avenue toward Mill Street. But to museum officials, the thought of losing the piece was like losing a limb.

"I think people came to identify it with the museum," Executive Director Christine H. Callahan said. "It became part of our landscape, and we didn't want to lose it."

Coincidentally, around the same time, the museum received a monetary gift from Maureen Donnell of Newport and Palm Beach to acquire a piece of sculpture. The gift paid for the purchase of the sculpture from Newman and a South African black granite base on which it now rests. Last Thursday, a crane from Rex Monumental Works of Fall River, Mass., hoisted the piece onto its base in a new spot outside the museum's Cushing Gallery.

Donnell's generosity was among the most significant gifts made to the collections of the city's cultural institutions during 2001, according to a survey by The Daily News. Curators named artwork, photographs, furniture, boats and collectibles among their favorite gifts this year. While institutions benefit from such gifts, donors do, too. Generally speaking, cash gifts are fully tax deductible, al-

though income limits might require the deduction to be carried over into future years.

Donors are entitled to deduct the full market value of a piece of property given to a charity from their adjusted gross income, which lowers their taxable income, said Richard A. Plotkin, an accountant and the chairman of Rooney Plotkin & Willey of Newport and Providence. A charitable gift of property also allows donors to, in effect, never pay taxes on the appreciation of an item's fair market value during the time they own it, he said.

Many institutions have little or no budget for acquisitions and must rely on donors to strengthen

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**Top left:** The Preservation Society of Newport County received a collection of family memorabilia from the great-grandson of famed late 19th century architect Richard Morris Hunt. The collection included a photo album with a picture of Hunt and his wife, Catherine Howland Hunt, on their honeymoon in Paris in 1861.



**Middle left:** A gift from the Sordoni Foundation allowed the National Museum of American Illustration at Vernon Court to acquire Frank Schoonover's 1908 painting illustrating the Jack London short story, 'To Build A Fire.'



**Bottom left:** Scottish tradesmen pose outside Rockhurst at the end of Bellevue Avenue for photographer James Nicholson around 1889. Nicholson's descendants donated the negatives of this and other images to the Newport Historical Society, which presented an exhibit of Nicholson's paintings in 2001.



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their collections. Newman's sculpture will augment the Newport Art Museum's growing outdoor sculpture garden, which includes "Reconfiguration," a steel sculpture by Michael D. Hansel, head of the art department at St. George's School in Middletown, acquired last year through another Donnell gift.

Institutions must be choosy in accepting donated items. With gifts comes responsibility. The institution must find space to display or store gifts. Special climate controls may be necessary to keep a gift, or it might need restoration work. Gifts also must be relevant to the institution's mission to pass muster with its collections committee. Space constraints led the Preservation Society of Newport County to say "no" to six pianos and an oversized rug this year, Curator Paul F. Miller said. Thirty-five paintings shipped to the National Museum of American Illustration at Vernon Court in Newport last week will be returned to their donor because they were inappropriate for the museum, Chairman Laurence Cutler said. The owner neglected to first send photographs of the paintings for the museum to review.

"We say no to a gift if it's in bad condition and there's no way for us to take care of it. We say no to a gift if it's outside of what we do," said Redwood Library Director Cheryl V. Helms. "By and large, most people understand."

### Cabinetmaker's observations

The Redwood Library received about 10,000 books this year, about 85 percent of them going to the library's twice-a-year book sale, Helms said. Among the significant gifts the Redwood received this year were a daybook by Jonas Bergner, a Swedish immigrant and cabinetmaker who arrived in Newport in the late 19th century. Redwood had the daybook and an intricate hand-carved child's chair Bergner made on loan from his great-granddaughter, Cynthia Mahoney of Pahrump, Nev., since September. Earlier this month, Mahoney formally donated them to the Redwood's collection.

The daybook spans from about 1920 to 1930 and includes entries of many of the furniture pieces Bergner repaired, including the products of some of Newport's famed colonial craftsmen. He made meticulous observations about the dimensions and construction of each item and gave his own observations when he had doubts about the creator of the piece. The daybook, Helms said, provides invaluable information and instructions for making the furniture pieces.

"In her note to us, she said it felt like it was coming home," Helms said. "She wanted the book to come to a place where it would be treasured and where it would be available to scholars."

### Homage to famed architect

The Preservation Society of Newport County received an important gift of family memorabilia from the great-grandson of Richard Morris Hunt, America's most fashionable architect of the late 19th century who designed The Breakers and Marble House as well as the Newport Art Museum's Griswold House.

The items Richard Howland Hunt drove from his home in Connecticut to deliver to Newport earlier this month included two bronze statues that served as the models for a memorial to his great-grandfather at Fifth Avenue at 70th Street in New York City. Dated 1898 and 1899, the pair of patinated bronze, classically-clad female figures by Daniel Chester French represent the allied arts and architecture. One holds a palette and sculptor's mallet while the other holds a model of the administration building Hunt designed for the Chicago Columbian Exposition.

"I'd never seen them before," Miller said. "They are our first Daniel Chester Frenches."

Miller said the statues will soon be placed on display at The Marble House. Also included among the donated items are Hunt family photo albums, toiletries and a bronze model of the left hand of the architect's sister, June M. Hunt, cast in Paris in 1852.

The Preservation Society's acquisition budget to buy objects for its collection relies exclusively on contributions from donors, which since the society's founding in 1945 has amounted to a total of \$300,000, Miller said.

"That wouldn't be a single Newport chair," he said.

### Gift saves piece of history

Sometimes, an institution is will-

ing to go to great lengths to accept a gift, especially if it is endangered. That was the case last January, when the International Yacht Restoration School hired a contractor to haul the 46-foot ocean racing yawl Carina from outside St. Augustine, Fla., to Newport.

The boat was deteriorating in a field behind a private residence when a third party tipped off officials at IYRS, who contacted its owner, Robert Balch. He had given up hope of restoring the vessel, said Program Director Clark O. Poston.

"She's a world famous ocean racing yacht that was going to be destroyed if we had not stepped in and taken ownership of the boat and transported her to our site," Poston said.

"We have boats that we've accepted that were in worse condition than her, but she's in pretty bad shape."

Built in 1940 by Lund Boat Works of Erie, Pa., Carina won the 1952 Bermuda race and the 1953 Block Island race under the father-and-son

team of Richard S. and Richard B. Nye. The boat was still racing as late as 1970, when it placed first in the St. Petersburg-to-Fort Lauderdale race.

Poston said Carina is awaiting a major restoration and may serve as a teaching tool for the school's third- and fourth-year students.

"She represents a pinnacle in design and construction that is relatively important in the overall picture of the history of American yachting," Poston said.

The Museum of Yachting received a replica of a 20-foot No Man's Land Boat in July. The centerboard ketch design is now part of the museum's classic "in water" collection and can be sailed in Newport Harbor during the summer months. It is one of 13 boats the museum accepted as gifts this year.

"You will not see anything like it on the water out here," Executive Director Patrick L. Muldoon said.

Named after the island off Cape Cod, No Man's Land Boats were designed, built and fitted to be launched from a beach and to beach upon return. In use as early as 1850, the boats had an excellent reputation for safety. Made of white cedar planks on an oak frame with copper fasteners and sails of Egyptian cotton, the replica was originally made in the 1960s by the Chewonki Foundation in Wiscasset, Maine. It had deteriorated over the years until it was acquired in 1985 by Chris Fabiszak, who restored it to mint condition. Fabiszak traded the boat for a restored 1910 Old Town canoe from fellow Jamestown John A. Murphy, who gave it to his father Neale D. Murphy, who then donated it to the museum.

### Jack London story illustration

Judy Cutler, museum director at the National Museum of American Illustration, knew just what she wanted when the Sordani Foundation offered to make a monetary donation to acquire a painting last summer. She had tried unsuccessfully to convince the owner of a 1908 Frank Schoonover painting, "To Build A Fire," to donate the piece to the museum, but he said he couldn't afford to do so. She was able to persuade the man to lower his asking price and the foundation to increase its original donation in order to buy the painting, which now hangs in the south loggia at Vernon Court on Bellevue Avenue.

The oil painting depicts a lone figure and a dog, which illustrated Jack London's short story set in the Yukon. The man is clearly freezing while building a fire in a vain attempt to save his life. He had ignored an important rule of the wilderness: never travel alone on a trek in the wild.

"I just love the atmosphere, the way it envelopes you. It brings you into the picture, into the story," Cutler said. "It's just such a moving illustration, beautifully painted in muted tones. You feel really cold. The fire's about to go out."