

Artists of the Vineyard Rally With Donations to Legal Fund

By NIS KILDEGAARD

In the art event of summer 1988 and the political happening of the Vineyard season as well, works donated by more than 120 artists, galleries and collectors will be shown next week and auctioned on July 30 at the On the Vineyard Gallery on State Road, Vineyard Haven.

The roster of contributors reads like a Who's Who of the Island art scene, from Rose Abrahamson to Barney Zeitz. It's an unprecedented gathering, a list that quickly becomes dizzying to the follower of the arts in this community. Virginia Besse, Ray Ellis and Jules Feiffer. Joseph Hazen Jr., Lois Mailou Jones, Doug Kent and Joseph Low. Tom Maley, Thaw Malin and Steve Mills. Stanley Murphy, Ned Reade, Rose Treat, Allen Whiting and Rez Williams.

Shirley Feldman, an organizer of the show and sale, thinks she knows what has brought these artists together. "I think these artists have captured the beauty of the Island," she says, "and they want to preserve it. These people love the Vineyard."

Proceeds from the July 30 auction benefit the legal defense fund of the Vineyard Conservation Society, which, with the Citizens for a Livable Island, is waging a legal battle to block construction of a bank and supermarket complex on State Road, Vineyard Haven. The controversial plan would be one of the largest commercial developments in Island history.

Mrs. Feldman recalls how a conver-

sation with artist and playwright Jules Feiffer launched the project that has become next week's show and sale.

"I called him last fall, the night before he was leaving the Island, because I wanted him to give a donation to the CLI legal defense fund. He said, 'What can I do for you? Do you want a cartoon for your auction?' Then it dawned. This winter, we got to working on it, and it just blossomed," she says.

Eleanor Graves, who is also busy with her own Tiasquam Gallery on the Middle Road in Chilmark this summer, remembers being invited to help with the auction project in its early stages. "I came to the Island at the end of May," she recalls. "I got a call from Shirley saying that they needed money for the legal defense fund, and were planning an art auction and needed some help, and would I come aboard — that was her phrase — in sorting this out and getting it off the ground. I said I certainly would."

"That was not a hard decision for me, because I felt that the cause was right. I have no political axe to grind with the bank, but I have felt, for a long time, a deep concern about growth on the Island."

Mrs. Graves came to the auction project with a special concern for the position of artists. "Artists are so often asked to give," she explains. "They have something tangible; they're an easy place to turn. We don't go asking doctors to give a certain

amount of consulting time, or lawyers. And many artists on the Island are totally dependent upon their art for their livelihood.

"And the tax laws are terrible for painters. They can deduct only the cost of their materials, canvas and paint. It's preposterous."

So Mrs. Graves, with her sensitivity to the predicament of artists, insisted that there be no pressure on them to contribute. Months later, she reflects that the pressure has come in the opposite and unexpected form of offers from artists they hadn't even approached, artists who want to donate work and support their cause.

"We asked the artists to give whatever they wanted to give, understanding that what they would give might be very small — a drawing, a sketch, whatever," Mrs. Graves said. "But I have found the response to be absolutely extraordinary. The people I have talked to have been extraordinarily generous."

One supporter whose help has made the whole project possible is gallery owner Doug Parker, who donated space for the show and auction. Says Mrs. Feldman, "He really gave us carte blanche. He said we could pick our time for the auction, and use his gallery, and show the work for the week before. That's very important, to have art that's going to be auctioned visible to the public."

The show goes up this weekend, and opens for viewing with hours from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Monday, July 25 through Saturday, July 30. The auction itself will be from 4 to 6:30 p.m.

on that final day, conducted chiefly by auctioneer John Schofield, a partner in the Cape Cod auction house of R.C. Eldred Co. and a respected appraiser of fine art. Among the Vineyard auctioneers volunteering to help on July 30 are Mike Levitas, Trip Barnes, Mike and Mary Wallace, Rose Styron and Beverly Sills.

An admission charge of \$20 for the reception and live auction will be credited to any purchase of art. Admission to the show through the week is free, and many of the smaller pieces will be sold by silent bidding which will proceed through the week and close at 4 p.m. sharp on July 30.

Says Mrs. Feldman, "Doug Parker told us he could exhibit about 70 things. When we started getting more than that, he said, 'Don't worry, we'll just plaster the walls.' We're wondering now how we're going to get it all in."