

COMFORT IN *The Artists' Fellowship*



Early members of the Artists' Fellowship.

For 140 years, the Artists' Fellowship has come to the aid of artists in emergency. First organized as the Helpful Society by artists sharing a New York City studio, the group's intention was to provide assistance to artists and their families in times of "sickness, bereavement, or financial distress." In 1925, it was renamed the Artists' Fellowship and incorporated in order to receive donations. Through careful, professional management of the fellowship's funds, the group's original mission has continued to be fulfilled.

The president of the fellowship, Marc Mellon, is quick to point out that aid is only for professional fine artists or their families. Assistance is never given to students, weekend painters, or hobbyists. Also, he says, "membership is in no way related to receiving aid." In other words, participation in the fellowship is not a sort of insurance policy. Aid is allocated based on the decision of the board of directors, which meets monthly to review applications. It assesses them, Mellon says, "by considering the professionalism of the applicant, the level of need, and the nature of the emergency."

The nearly 500 members are divided into three categories: Active (artist), Sustaining (individual non-artist), and Organizational (corporation or institution). The largest category is the Active group, which comprises artists who pay \$20 each in annual dues. The Sustaining members are non-artists who have an interest in art and

are often in related professional fields. Last, the organizational members are art organizations, such as the Salmagundi Club, the National Arts Club, and the Art Students League of New York, as well as *American Artist*, which is a longtime supporter. The fellowship also grants lifetime membership to recipients of the Gold Medal. These members include: Everett Raymond Kinstler, Eric Sloane, Will Barnett, Chen Chi, Louise Nevelson, Jacob Lawrence, architect Michael Graves, and the director of the Butler Institute of American Art, Dr. Louis A. Zona. Through this collective membership, nearly every art organization is represented, and this network is often the means by which artists in need are found.

The fellowship's aid takes a variety of forms. "There are elderly and disabled artists who receive monthly assistance from us, and other artists who receive assistance until they can recover from an illness or accident," Mellon says. "We have also helped families of artists who have died and left their next of kin in need, and artists who have had to lay down their painting or sculpture tools to attend to a sick family member. We have often assisted an unin-

sured or under-insured professional artist jarred with the unexpected costs of a health emergency, and we also give one-time assistance to individual artists in need." This aid is given freely, with no stipulations on how the money can be spent and no expectation of repayment.

Although in the process of reviewing an application board members often call upon the expertise of physicians or social workers, the applicant's name is kept in the strictest of confidentiality. The fellowship does not allow the dignity of the artist in need to be undermined in any way.

The members of the fellowship receive a biannual newsletter and are invited to an annual awards dinner. This year's was held May 7 at the National Arts Club in New York City. The fellowship awarded the Benjamin West Clinedinst Medal to Peter Cox for his achievements of exceptional artistic merit. The Gari Melcher Medal went to the National Arts Club and O. Aldon James, Jr., the club's president, for their role in supporting the arts.

For more information on membership or aid applications, write: Artists' Fellowship, Inc., Dept. AA, 47 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003.

Some current members at the 1997 awards ceremony.

