



One of the Ahmanson Foundation presents to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is Simon Vouet's painting, "Virginia da Bezzo" (1627).

Who says L.A. gives fine arts a bad deal?

Is there any lingering question of the popular support for L.A.'s new Museum of Contemporary Art? Not any more. Since their first solicitation for membership was mailed last August, over 8,500 have pledged their \$30 to join, giving the museum one of the largest, perhaps the largest, membership of any contemporary art museum in the country. And that's not even counting their 550 founders and 150 investors. By comparison, the membership of the Newport Harbor Art Museum is 5,500; La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art has 1,883; Walker Art Center in Minneapolis claims 5,200; Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art is most populous with 6,500; Fort Worth Art Museum has 800; New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art claims a little

under 1,000; Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse has 2,300. For a city constantly accused of displaying little support for fine art, the L.A. County Museum of Art also has the one of the largest memberships in the country.

MoCA may have the largest membership, but at least one recent subscriber has a complaint. Nina Elkin received her membership card with a questionnaire asking for information she found to be insulting, even though the responses are kept anonymous. Elkin had grave doubts about questions asking her sex, race, occupation, household income, volunteer involvement and cultural contributions. "They should have included another letter with the form saying 'We want to make money.' If I thought they only wanted white, professional entrepreneurs, I wouldn't have joined.

ART NEWS Hunter Drohojowska

These kinds of forms remind me of the '50s." She canceled her membership.

Sue Johnson, MoCA's membership director, said that the ques-

tionnaire, a "common practice," was suggested by their direct mail consultant so they could adjust future programming.

The photography community of L.A. is about to get its biggest boon ever. The L.A. County Museum of Art has just received a whopping \$1 million grant from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation to create an autonomous photography department. One of the largest grants ever received by the museum, the funds will be used to establish a comprehensive curatorial, acquisitions and exhibitions program and to build a photography gallery. Previously the photography was a small adjunct to the museum's department of prints and drawings.

It has long been an end-of-the-year ritual for the Ahmanson Foundation to donate a painting to LACMA. But the Christmas spirit must be in evidence this season, for three paintings were given: Guido Reni's "Portrait of Cardinal Roberto Ubaldino" (1625-27); Bartolome Murillo's "Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine" (c. 1680), an oil sketch for his last major commission; and Simon Vouet's "Virginia da

Bezzo, The Artist's Wife as the Magdalen" (1627). The museum will put them on view later this winter.

Christie's continues to be pleased, and not a little amazed, at the above-estimate prices brought at recent auctions. Their sale of 20th-century decorative arts by architects and designers from the Arts and Crafts Movement brought \$2,099,768, an international record.

An all-time high was established for a piece from that movement, as well as for the individual artist, when \$93,500 was paid for a Honduras mahogany wall bench (1907-1909) designed by Pasadena architects Charles Greene and Henry Greene for the Robert Blacker House. A mahogany and teak chest with carved ebony panels, also designed by Greene and Greene, brought \$52,800. An inlaid oak secretary, considered one of the rarest pieces at the sale, designed by Harvey Ellis and executed by Gustav Stickley brought an artists' record of \$46,200. An individual high for Stickley was established when \$35,200 was paid for his "Prairie Settle," a long wooden bench. Lucia Matthews' painted and gilt wood covered jar (c. 1906) fetched an individual artist record of \$30,800.