WHO WE ARE — HISTORY OF THE GIBBES WOMEN’S COUNCIL

The Gibbes Art Gallery Auxiliary, forerunner of the Women’s Council, was formed in 1950 at the request of the Carolina Art Association. It was the first auxiliary group at the Gibbes Museum, and it became the Women’s Council of the Carolina Art Association in 1968. As of March, 2020, the group had 225 members who support the Gibbes through their time and talents and the financial support they provide the Museum through fundraising activities and other means.

In 1970, the Council founded and staffed a museum store, the Turtle Shop. It was named after Anna Heyward Taylor’s woodblock print, called Sea Turtle. The original mission for the store was the potential it offered for earned income due to the city’s increased tourism. During the recent Gibbes’ Capital Campaign, the Women’s Council raised over $250,000 to secure the naming rights of the store. It is now called the Gibbes Women’s Council Museum Store. The shop presently employs a manager and assistants and the Women’s Council continues to volunteer in the shop.

In 1971, just after the opening of the Turtle Shop, the Hibernian Hall gala was the first fundraiser held by the Council. Five galas were held at the Museum in the 1980s. Over the years, there have been other various fundraising activities developed by the members, such as catering on a contract basis, Christmas museum shop previews, lecture and film programs, antique and floral shows and the Holiday House Tour in 1991.

The Art of Design (AOD) has now become our primary fundraising activity. It still represents a huge commitment for the members in terms of planning and time, but its beginnings were much more labor intensive. The first AOD was chaired by Dolly Lipman, who later became our president. She recalled that Art of Design started as Fine Art and Flowers with Chris Gifstos, who was the former head of floral design for New York’s Metropolitan Museum. He created floral designs while he spoke which were then auctioned to attendees. Ticket sales had initially been slow but the event sold out. Consequently, many committee members had to stand during the event. There were very few sponsors; some food was donated because the caterer refused to reduce his price. The event raised $7,500. Today, AOD consists of a sponsor party in a home in Charleston’s historic district on the Thursday evening prior to the luncheon on Friday. Both events are fully catered. Since the completion of the Gibbes’ renovation in 2016, AOD has been held in the Lenhardt Garden and has been a sell-out for the past four years. With the great success of AOD, the GWC has raised almost $600,000 through this fund-raising event which has enabled us to support art education programs, concert series and visiting artists.

The Gibbes Women’s Council is a self-governing board, governed by a Board of Directors, with the four officers elected for a two-year term. We have two general membership meetings per year, fall and spring. Additionally, we schedule other events around exhibits at the Museum, take an Out of Charleston field Trip, and visit other local art and design institutions. We celebrated the holiday season and end the year with an annual picnic.

The year 2019–2020 marked the 70th anniversary of the Women’s Council and the 10th anniversary of Art of Design. AOD 2020 raised more money than in the past nine years, had more GWC members as sponsors, and also had more corporate sponsors than in the past nine years. It was a resounding success.

On March 18, 2020, the Gibbes Museum was forced to close due to the COVID 19 Pandemic. All in-person events were canceled (including the Annual Picnic), and GWC Board meetings were on Zoom.

REVISED 2022
The year 2020–2021 began with us masked up and back in the Museum holding in-person socially distanced events. Our September and January Membership meetings were also offered virtually. By March 5, we were able to host a small group of 120 for a very successful Art of Design in the Lenhardt Garden. By May 2021, we were able to celebrate the end of the year with our Annual Picnic, face to face and maskless.

We were thankful to begin year 2021-2022 that allowed us to gather again as a group. Our September membership meeting included Dr. Mary Trent discussing Light Effects: The French Impressionists. In October we had a guided tour of McLeod Plantation with a boxed lunch under the pavilion and oaks. We had our annual December Holiday Party in the beautifully decorated Gibbes Museum. Our January membership meeting featured author Janet Lee Berg who discussed her two books: Rembrandt’s Shadow and Restitution. The “Out of Charleston” trip was a behind the scenes tour of Brookgreen Gardens which included the Anna Hyatt Huntington Sculpture gallery, boxed lunch under the oaks and a river boat tour of the rice fields. Our Annual Meeting and Picnic was held in April. The inaugural Art Charleston was held May 9th –12th. The Art of Design Sponsor Party was held on May 9th and our always “sold out” Art of Design Luncheon was held on May 10th with Lewis Miller as our speaker.