

The Rape of the Rose
By Francine Koslow Miller and others



Brandeis University
Alumni Association

Brandeis University

Alumni Directory
Project 2009

Dear Dr. Francine Amy Miller '73,

Since September, we've been contacting alumni by phone and by mail, to gather information on recent address changes and professional updates.

Many have responded, and the project will culminate in a very special publication. You can have it in hand by June when you reply today.

[Tell Me More](#)

Thank you for your prompt response,

Kelly J. Hardy
Harris Connect Directory Office
For Brandeis University

1. On February 5, 2009, President Reinharz told *the Boston Globe*, "We're not saying we're closing the Rose Art Museum....We're saying we're turning it into a gallery and teaching site for the faculty of Fine Arts. We don't want to be in the public museum business.
2. On March 2, 2009 *The Wall Street Journal* reiterated that President Reinharz's January 26, 2009 decision to close the Rose as a public institution had not changed.
3. A Town meeting to discuss the decisions concerning the Rose Art Museum was held on February 10, 2009 to discuss recent decisions concerning the Rose Art Museum.
4. "Preserving the Trust: Art and the Art Museum amidst financial Crisis".
A symposium at the Rose March 16.

From: _____@bradeis.edu
Date: Monday, January 26, 2009, 8:20PM
Subject: Important Message Regarding the Rose Art Museum

January 26, 2009

Dear Friends,

The global financial crisis and deepening national economic recession require Brandeis to formulate and execute decisive plans that will position the university to emerge stronger for the benefit of our students. To this end, our response to the crisis is to focus and sustain our core academic mission. I am writing to tell you that the Board of Trustees met today and voted to close the Rose Art Museum. The decision was difficult and was reached after a painstaking assessment of the university's need to mobilize for the future and initiate a strategy to replenish our financial assets.

The Rose has been a marvelous addition to the Fine Arts program, and we are grateful to everyone who expressed their love for art and admiration for Brandeis's academic mission by helping to create, build, and support the museum. Choosing between and among important and valued university assets is terrible, but our priority in the face of hard choices will always be the university's core teaching and research mission. Today's decision will set in motion a long-term plan to sell the art collection and convert the professional art facility to a teaching, studio, and gallery space for undergraduate and graduate students and faculty.

The university's official public statement can be found below. I will be writing to the community shortly to update you on other initiatives currently under discussion by the faculty and the administration.

Sincerely,

Jehuda Reinharz

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY NEWS

With vote to close art museum, Brandeis renews 'unwavering' commitment to

students, research and academic mission

WALTHAM, Mass., Jan. 26, 2009 -- Brandeis University's Board of Trustees today voted unanimously to close the Rose Art Museum as part of a campus-wide effort to preserve the university's educational mission in the face of the historic economic recession and financial crisis. Board members stressed that the museum decision will not alter the university's commitment to the arts and the teaching of the arts.

"These are extraordinary times," said Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz. "We cannot control or fix the nation's economic problems. We can only do what we have been entrusted to do -- act responsibly with the best interests of our students and their futures foremost in mind."

Opened in 1961, the Rose Art Museum houses a large amount of modern and contemporary art. Plans call for the museum to close in late summer 2009, and transition into a fine-arts teaching center with studio space and an exhibition gallery.

After necessary legal approvals and working with a top auction house, the university will publicly sell the art collection. Proceeds from the sale will be reinvested in the university to combat the far-reaching effects of the economic crisis, and fortify the university's position for the future.

Brandeis officials said the decision to close the museum is part of an emerging new vision for the university aimed at streamlining it for the future while bolstering its focus on undergraduates, the liberal arts and research.

In recent months, the university has been reviewing expenditures and discussing new initiatives to meet the serious economic challenges. Belt tightening has already brought substantial decreases in administrative budgets.

In a special session on Jan. 22, the Brandeis faculty voted unanimously to support the president and trustees as they combat the effects of the economic recession and work to make Brandeis stronger academically and fiscally for the 21st century. Faculty members agreed that the university should maintain the strengths that have helped position Brandeis among the nation's top liberal arts and research institutions.

Brandeis officials have estimated that the economic recession will continue to adversely affect operating expenses, performance of the endowment, financial aid and scholarships. At Brandeis and schools around the country, fundraising revenue is declining and families are looking for more financial aid to help them cope with their own unenviable economic straits.

Reinharz said the Rose Museum decision was very difficult. But he characterized it

as an important step in the ongoing resource management and allocation process on the school's campus. "I am satisfied that our commitment is unwavering; that someday we will look back and say that when the quality of education and student services was at stake, we made hard choices so that Brandeis could emerge even stronger."

--END OF STORY--

WBUR/NPR January 26, 2009 5:35 PM Andrea Shea, reporting on the probable closing of the Rose Art Museum interviews Art Critic for *Artforum* Francine Koslow Miller, Louis D. Brandeis Scholar, 1973.

Francine Koslow Miller :“ The Wholesale sell-off of multi-million dollar art treasures by Brandeis University is a travesty of justice.”

Q&A with Rose Art Museum director Michael RushBy almost any standard, the Rose Art Museum is a model university art museum. It has a fine collection. It exhibits it regularly and creatively. It provides a place for the vanguard to emerge. Administratively, the museum draws about half of its operating budget from endowment funds -- a stunningly high percentage. So when I talked with Michael Rush, the Rose's director this morning, he was eager to point out that what's happening at the Rose has nothing to do with the Rose and everything to do with Brandeis. To read more about the history of the Rose, [click here](#). [Image: Marsden Hartley's *Musical Theme (Oriental Symphony)*, 1913, from the collection of the Rose Art Museum, dammit.]

MAN: Are you encouraging your trustees to explore legal options?

Michael Rush: I'm encouraging everybody to take every step they want to take. There are any number of things going on right now. There are [Facebook groups](#), a '[Save the Rose](#)' website. And we have several lawyers on the board who are absolutely looking into legal issues.

One thing that is not coming out -- clearly -- is this: Some of these really well-meaning young alums are doing the Obama routine of having people send small amounts of money. As darling as that is, it's misguided. *The Rose is not in financial trouble*. We're secure. I can't say that strongly enough. We're meeting our fundraising goals. We're doing fine. We have a tight managerial structure. We're utterly responsible. There's no trouble for the Rose.

This is all about selling the artwork. If the university gives any indication that they're selling the Rose to save money, that's untrue. They're just selling the artwork. The university doesn't give us a penny. We are financially autonomous within the university. They don't pay our salaries or anything, just below-the-line costs like the heat and the lights. That's not going to change if they get rid of us - they're going to use the building for something else, and they'll have those same costs.

So this does not change their equation economically at all. In fact it hurts them: Not only do they not give us any cash, all of our income is 'taxed' at 15 percent. We actually pay them. So they're losing the 15 percent that we raise that they take off the top of our hard-earned money. And believe me, it's hard-earned.

MAN: Just judging from the outrage I read in Geoff Edgers' Globe story this morning, you have some absolutely irate board members.

MR: Yes. Lois Foster [who is prominently quoted in the Globe story] has been more involved with [the Rose] than anyone has ever been. She's been on the board and she has been writing 'thank-you' notes in her own hand for 40 years. She's been the glue of this place. Many of our members are members because of both her and her recently deceased husband. He was president of the university board. If Henry had been there, this would not have happened. [Image: Jasper Johns' *Drawer*, 1957. Collection of the Rose Art Museum, dammit.]

MAN: Given that she's a significant donor, is she exploring legal options?

MR: She's not going there. She's an 80-year-old woman. She's coming up to Boston for an operation. She's not walking very well. She's clearly expressed her opinion to the president, but she's not a rabble-rouser that way. But she *is* angry. Her comments are very unusual. It shows the degree of anger and feelings of betrayal. We all feel so betrayed. Terribly betrayed. I've been here three years. Ironically for me, my tenure here has been totally identified with this collection: Bringing it out, raising money for storage, tripling the insurance for it. It's been all about our collection.

MAN: So there are trustees that are engaged with the attorney general, that are examining their standing to take legal action and so on?

MR: Yes. I haven't [talked with the attorney general's office]. I was with my board chair [Jonathan Lee] last night and a few other people. He's going to be talking with the attorney general and the governor too.

MAN: You mentioned earlier in our conversation that the Rose had an endowment that, at its peak was at \$20 million and that it's down about 25 percent because of the recent market drop. The Rose's donors gave that money to the Rose, not to Brandeis. So if Brandeis closes the Rose, does Brandeis essentially 'steal' that money?

MR: I don't know what to say about that. If the Rose is closed, yeah, the university would take it over.

Their due diligence will involve examination of all the endowments and the intentions of the endowment, the ones that are restricted. Many of our endowments *are* restricted. One is restricted to the director's salary, that one is from from the Fosters. There's another that is restricted to the maintenance of the Foster Wing. Our biggest endowments are restricted to acquisitions, that can only be used for the purchase of art.

MAN: Ah, so when you deaccessioned the Hassam a few years back because your collection and mission is modern and contemporary art, you put that money into a restricted endowment?

MR: Yes.

MAN: It seems to me that one of the ironic absurdities in all of this is that the major collection catalogue that the Rose is about to publish could essentially be turned into a sales prospectus.

MR: That's another huge story. I heard yesterday that at some other meeting about the future of all things Rose -- to which we were not invited -- there was support for continuing the publication of the catalogue! [Image: Roy Lichtenstein, *Forget It, Forget Me*, 1962. Collection of the Rose Art Museum, dammit.]

As for its being a sales prospectus, I hope not. I'm not privy to any discussions in this regard. We've just been cut out of all discussions here. When I heard they were having a big pow-wow with university officials and *none* of us were invited, not staff, not the director, not the board, not even the people we know so well who are our friends... well, I'll tell you, I know the catalogue intimately. They will have to change several sentences because they're all geared toward the greatness of the Rose and the history of the Rose. The president has a 'thank-you' in it and an acknowledgment of how great the Rose was. September is the publication date. It is in production. It's being edited. It's being designed and printed.

MAN: You've also done a superb job of making the collection accessible, and not just through the catalogue.

MR: Our Johns is going to Philly for their Cezanne show. Our Hartley is opening tonight at the Guggenheim. Another is about to go to the Reina Sofia.

You know, you can talk about our relatively low foot-traffic for a museum. The point of the greatness of this place is not the hundreds of thousands of people who come here in one day. But there are hundreds of thousands of people around the world who see Rose artworks, clearly marked from as being from here, at the Louvre, the Tate, the Art Institute of Chicago, and so on. At any given time, hundreds of thousands of people are seeing work from Brandeis, from the Rose Art Museum.

And this is really important too: We gave the first museum exhibitions to -- off the top of my head -- Kiki Smith, Louise Nevelson, Dana Schutz, Roxy Paine, Alexis Rockman... the list goes on and on. It's not about audience. So much great and significant and influential work was performed in front of three people. Merce Cunningham, John Cage, The Wooster Group... people who eventually drew large crowds. That's never, ever the point. That's the great freedom of an institution like ours: That never has to be a primary impulse. We never have to say, 'What's going to bring them in the door?'

MAN: It seems likely to me that legal machinations will likely extend beyond June. So what happens to all of you then?

MR: Our jobs are guaranteed until June 30. We're very much on the job market. My staff is the greatest group of people in the world. I can't communicate how stunning this is to all of us.

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January 28, 2009 11:01 AM | [Permalink](#)

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CultureGrrl

Lee Rosenbaum's cultural commentary

**Rose Lends to Philly's Cézanne Show; More Brandeis Administration
Disinformation**

For another in the continuing series of exhibitions demonstrating why disposing of important works from the collection of Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum collection should be a non-starter, we now take you to [Cézanne and Beyond](#) at the Philadelphia Museum.

Below, on the left, is a Rose-owned painting in that show. On the right, the painting that hangs to its right:

Left: Jasper Johns, "Drawer," 1957, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University

Right: Paul Cézanne, "Curtain, Jug and Comptier," 1893-4, Private Collection, Chicago

Johns takes a disembodied drawer (which could be an allusion to Cézanne's tables with drawers, like the one on the right) and he does something else with it---camouflages it with the same scumbled, mottled application of paint that forms the background of this and many other Cézanne still lifes. Like the other artists in the show, Johns purloined talismans from the master and made them completely his own.

In the past few months, we've seen a mini-display of important Rose loans, including [here](#) and [here](#). These works should remain in the public domain, at the institution that the donors intended to benefit.

Meanwhile, Brandeis president Jehuda Reinharz, caught in an astonishing [series of](#)

flip-flops, is now resorting to the time-honored blame-the-media gambit. There is only word for his disinformation campaign---"*chutzpah*."

In an e-mail sent Thursday to Cousin Debby and other Brandeis alums, Reinharz asserted:

Unfortunately, there has been a great deal of misinformation circulating in the media regarding the Rose....The Rose is NOT going to close. [It was Reinharz, not the ink-stained wretches, who first disseminated this supposed "misinformation." The administration's initial statement explicitly announced "the decision to close the museum"]....

We are pleased to share the news that a donor recently stepped forward to help fund the continued operations of the museum. [The museum itself, unlike the university, was not in financial trouble in the first place, although it may be, now that the administration has alienated its support base. Who IS the new Mystery Donor, we all wonder.]

The Board of Trustees voted to authorize Brandeis to sell a limited number of pieces in the collection---if the need arises in the future. Nothing will be sold into the currently depressed art market. [This is the first time I've heard Reinharz say unequivocally that the university intends to wait out the price slump. By the time the art market recovers, the overall economy and university's financial situation may well have improved too.]

Notwithstanding these assertions, as the Rose's own renegade website still defiantly states:

The decision to close the Rose and sell art work has not changed. It's only been semantically modified.

The intention, as stated by Reinharz's latest missive, is to repurpose the museum "as a teaching and exhibition gallery." This is consistent with another important campus-wide initiative---to encourage staff and faculty to "join Weight Watchers on campus." It appears that the museum may likewise slim down.

But some of the Rose's fat-wallet donors may be beefing up in a different way. My friendly source in the Rose Family, Fred Hoppin' Mad Hopengarten, informs me that his clan (better termed "*mishpocheh*") is planning a conclave next week to discuss the situation and their possible response.

John Hechinger of the Wall Street Journal reports:

Hopengarten...said he was canvassing relatives to pursue legal options to oppose the Brandeis plan. Mr. [Jerry] Fineberg [a former Rose chairman, who gave \$2 million for the museum's new wing] said he is consulting a lawyer and plans to ask for his big donation back and "give it to a real museum."

Nevertheless, I must concede that Reinharz is onto something. In his e-mail, he said this about the future:

We envision a day when the Rose will host additional events, welcome more visitors from both on and off campus, and exhibit student and faculty art alongside some of the collection's notable works.

The Elephant in the Rose is that, until the current crisis, relatively few students, faculty and members of the local community actually went there---a failing discussed in [this article](#) by Maxwell Price in a student newspaper, the Brandeis Hoot.

If there's any constructive lesson that college and university museum directors around the country can take away from this sorry saga, it's that they must reach out, early and often, to the entire community, on and off campus, making sure that everyone understands and experiences the great resource that their institutions and collections can be for a rich educational and cultural life.

A university museum's constituency shouldn't consist merely of art and art-history specialists.

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Letter from Jehuda Reinharz, February 4, 2009

Dear Members of the Brandeis community:

The past ten days have been extremely difficult for all of us. I have heard from many of you and listened carefully to your criticisms and constructive suggestions. I have read every message on the faculty list serve, and the thoughtful letter sent to me by a group of faculty last night. I have also heard from students, staff, alumni, university presidents and complete strangers about my statements regarding the vote by the Board of Trustees concerning the Rose Art Museum.

In retrospect, I wish I had handled the initial statements I made in a far more direct way. Unfortunately, those statements did not accurately reflect the Board's decision authorizing the administration to conduct "an orderly sale or other disposition of works from the university's collection." The statements gave the misleading impression that we were selling the entire collection immediately, which is not true. The University may have the option, subject to applicable legal requirements and procedures, to sell some artworks if necessary, but I assure you that other options will also be considered. The Museum will remain open, but in accordance with the Board's vote, it will be more fully integrated into the University's central educational mission. We will meet with all affected University constituencies to explore together how this can best be done.

I regret as well that I did not find a more inclusive and open way to engage the Brandeis

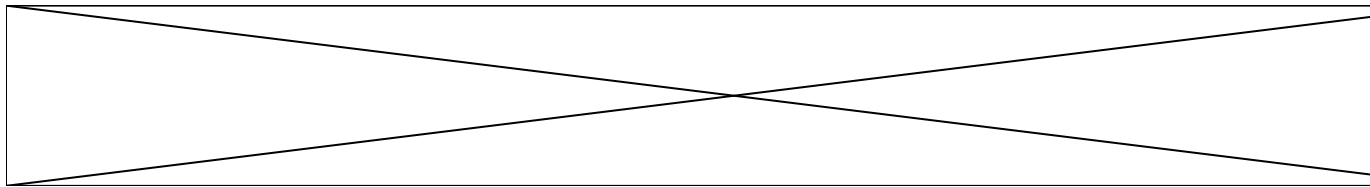
community in the deliberations that led to the Board's decision.

I take full responsibility for causing pain and embarrassment in both of these matters. To quote President Obama, "I screwed up."

Having learned from this experience, I will do my best, as will the entire administration, to work together with all of you in a collaborative manner. We must cooperate as we move forward to confront our financial crisis. But we also have to take bold steps. Obviously, we have many tasks ahead of us regarding the curriculum and the budget.

In meetings with members of the faculty and with students in the past few days, I have been heartened by the enormous reservoir of good will, imagination and willingness to work hard to guarantee that Brandeis will continue to thrive as a first-rate institution of higher learning.

Sincerely,
Jehuda Reinharz



In the Closing of Brandeis Museum, a Stark Statement of Priorities

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

Published: February 1, 2009

WALTHAM, Mass. — Few things are more poignant than a gem of a museum whose days may be numbered. So it was at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University on a visit Friday, days after the university's trustees voted unanimously to trash the institution by closing it and auctioning off the 6,000 works in its collection. The action came without consulting either the museum's own board of governors or its director, Michael Rush.



Erik Jacobs for The New York Times

Student protest signs greet visitors to the Rose Art Museum on the Brandeis campus.

The Brandeis vote was an act of breathtaking stealth and presumption: a raid on a museum that supports itself, raises its own funds and has consistently planned wisely for its own future without leaning on the university. The trustees treated it nonetheless as a disposable asset.

On Friday the only signs of any disturbance were on the exterior of the Rose's dainty, cast-concrete building, which opened in 1961, just 13 years after the university itself was founded. The museum's glass front was festooned with posters that exclaimed, "Don't Close the Rose" and "Fire Sale," the remnants of a student sit-in the day before.

But inside, the art was, as usual, doing what art is always trying to do, speak to people directly about pleasure and beauty, about personal capacity and freedom, about how individuals acting on their own can find themselves, express those findings and make a difference.

In the original 1961 part of the museum, "Saints and Sinners," an exhibition drawn largely from the museum's holdings, shows Brandeis interacting with the larger world of art and art institutions. It is part of a new series of shows organized by artists and curators from outside, in this case Laura Hoptman, a curator at the New Museum in New York. The works she has selected confirm the excellence of the Rose collection: pieces by Roy Lichtenstein, Bruce Conner, Philip Guston and Morris Louis. But beyond that, they create a daisy chain of links that invite close looking. Older artworks suddenly look fresh, recent ones seem utterly at home.

It is hard to know how anyone could destroy this museum, but that's what Brandeis announced it would do last Monday. It's hard to think of a comparably destructive — and self-destructive — move in the art world today.

The rationale, given by Brandeis, was the university's dire financial straits: a 25 percent decline in its endowment, a \$10 million deficit on this year's budget and the reality that fund-raising will falter because of the market's skid. You could almost feel the collective tremor of university museums around the country, as well as art dealers circling, indignant collectors demanding that the Rose return donated gifts of art, and prospective donors changing their wills.

Speaking to *The Boston Globe*, Lois Foster, a longtime benefactor, whose husband built the Lois Foster Wing barely eight years ago, compared it to a death. As the director, Mr. Rush, noted, even if the trustees reversed themselves or the museum was saved, who would ever again trust its autonomy enough to donate to it?

What the university's president, Jehuda Reinharz, and the trustees don't seem to realize is how their actions stain the reputation of Brandeis itself. He characterized the choice as "painful" and "difficult," but it had all the earmarks of a desperate quick fix rather than a rational decision. He even said it in no way diminished Brandeis's commitment to the visual arts, pointing out the university could turn the museum into an arts studio and study center. But the decision was devastating for the university's art and art history departments, which have always relied heavily on the museum.

At the museum on Friday, Aliza Sena, a 19-year-old sophomore, said that graduating seniors in art and art history were especially traumatized. "It's like the school telling them that their degree is fluff," Ms. Sena said. She transferred this year from Tulane University after deciding that she wanted to major in art rather than business, and the Rose was a major factor in her choice.