Inside Art | Carol Vogel

■ A double dispute over de Kooning bronzes ■ From Madison Avenue to Korea ■ More departures from the Whitney.



A bronze sculpture cast by Philip Pavia, among 48 cited in a suit involving Willem de Kooning and his daughter, Lisa de Kooning.

De Kooning's Sculptures

From 1987 to 1990, the Long Island sculptor Philip Pavia cast bronze sculptures that were created by his friend Willem de Kooning, the Abstract Expressionist painter. But since 1989, when Mr. de Kooning, who has Alzheimer's disease, was declared mentally incompetent, and his wife, the painter Elaine de Kooning, died, Mr. Pavia has not been paid.

The artist's daughter, Lisa de Kooning, who is also an artist and a conservator for her 89-year-old father's assets, says some of the sculptures Mr. Pavia cast were hers, not her father's. She also says she never commissioned Mr. Pavia's castings and has no knowledge of the arrangements Mr. Pavia says he had with her father.

On Monday, Mr. de Kooning will be fingerprinted at his home in East Hampton, L.I., to determine whose the sculptures were.

The decision to take the artist's fingerprints, made by Justice Karla Moskowitz of State Supreme Court in Manhattan, is the latest development in a three-year-old lawsuit filed by Mr. Pavia against Mr. de Kooning and his wife's estate, seeking a total of $3 million in compensation and damages. Mr. Pavia, a friend of Mr. de Kooning since the 1950's, has about 48 de Kooning sculptures in his possession, said Gale P. Elston, his lawyer, who estimated their value at more than $3 million. "This is a significant piece of de Kooning heritage, and were he compos mentis I'm sure de Kooning would want to preserve them," Ms. Elston said.

The Checks Stopped Coming

Mr. de Kooning has made about 28 finished sculptures since the late 1960's, most of them produced in editions of varying sizes. His sculptures range in height from a few inches to 12 feet, and many started out as small, hand-size figures. Mr. Pavia's holdings include four different sculptures, each about six inches high, that have been cast in editions of seven, with three artist's proofs (the first castings). There are also four enlargements, seven and a half times as big as the originals, and each has one artist's proof.

Mr. Pavia has tried to collect payment for his time and for foundry costs incurred after the death of Mrs. de Kooning, who he says paid him regularly by check. "In the beginning he was repeatedly told by Lisa and her lawyers that he shouldn't worry; the bills would be taken care of," Ms. Elston said. "But they haven't."

Mr. Pavia had no written agreement. There are, however, bills marked de Kooning from foundries in Italy. "The fact that Mrs. de Kooning paid by check is written evidence," Ms. Elston added.

A Different Style

Ms. Elston said she could not understand why Lisa de Kooning believes the sculptures are hers, since her style is said to be very different than her father's. She favors naïve forms, often of animals.

"Her general style of sculpture is very different from her father's," said John A. Silberman, one of Ms. de Kooning's lawyers. "Nonetheless, she has been very influenced by him. In fact, it has been very frustrating to her that whenever she attempts making abstract sculptures, she realizes that they often resemble her father's work."

Mr. Silberman added that Ms. de Kooning, as a conservator of her father's assets, has a responsibility to safeguard the authenticity of her father's work. He noted that it was not in her own financial interest, as Mr. de Kooning's heir, to claim the sculptures as her own.

Les Fagen, another lawyer for Ms. de Kooning, described the case as one with "a lot of questions but no answers," adding that "handshakes can be enforceable, but when the other person isn't available to testify, one has to be careful."

"Mr. Pavia is claiming lots of money, but we don't even know if there was such a deal made with the artist," Mr. Fagen said. He called the figure that reflects Mr. Pavia's time and expenses were made three years ago, Ms. Elston said. While no one is willing to say exactly what that amount is, a person close to Mr. Pavia said they believed he would be willing to settle for about $500,000. And once he is paid, Ms. Elston said, Mr. Pavia is willing to return all the sculptures except for the artist's proofs, which are traditionally kept by the person who casts them.

It wasn't until the judge gave permission to have Mr. de Kooning fingerprinted that there was any response to the question of a settlement, Ms. Elston said. In answer, Mr. Silberman said, "There has been an ongoing dialogue to try to resolve the case even before the hearing."

If the sculptures in Mr. Pavia's possession are indeed by Mr. de Kooning, it could raise the value of Mr. de Kooning's art holdings. While no one would put a definitive figure on the value of the artist's own collection, estimates range from $50 million to $150 million.

"It would certainly make the estate more valuable," said Anthony Grant, who heads the contemporary-art department at Sotheby's in New York. "Even table-size sculptures eclipsed the $100,000 mark at auction. And for a really great large work, they could be worth between $800,000 and $1.2 million."

Traveling Biennial

The Whitney Museum of American Art's 1993 Biennial is on the road, heading for the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul, South Korea, where it will be on view from Aug. 1 to Sept. 8. This is the first time a Whitney Biennial has traveled, but "Celebrating Calder," another Whitney show, is already in South Korea. It opened last month at the Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art in Kyongju and can be seen there through Sept. 19.

"The contemporary art scene in South Korea is lively and very progressive," said David A. Ross, the director of the Whitney. "Korean artists and museum professionals are in the vanguard of an exciting nation in the midst of great changes."

Elizabeth Sussman, who was the Whitney's curator for the Biennial, and Tae Man Choi, the curator at the National Museum in Seoul, selected 107 works by 64 of the 80 Biennial artists. The exhibition will include some installations created especially for Seoul by artists like Janine Antoni and Pepón Osorio.

Leaving the Whitney

Another piece of Whitney news: Amory Houghton, who joined the museum as its deputy director nine months ago, will be leaving Sept. 1. In a memo to the staff, David A. Ross, the museum director, cited no specific reasons for Mr. Houghton's departure but said that "as a result of conversations for the past two months, Mory has decided to leave the museum."

Stephen Schlough, a public relations officer at the museum, said that no successor for Mr. Houghton had been named but that the museum was looking for a deputy director to fill both his position and Jennifer Russell's. Ms. Russell, who had been the deputy director for internal affairs, left the museum last month.

Mr. Houghton confirmed his resignation but declined to discuss his reasons for leaving or his plans. "I've had a lot of fun here," Mr. Houghton said. "And everyone has been very supportive."

Art Showcase

Wally Findlay Galleries
17 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022
FOUNDED 1870
Specializing in Fine Quality Art for 120 Years

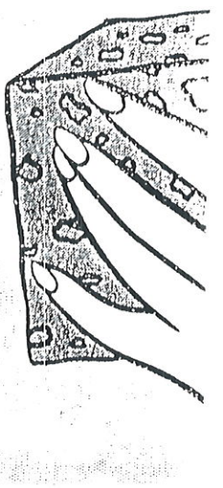
IMPORTANT EXHIBITION

Summer Art Festival

World Famous American and European Contemporary Artists

André Hambourg, Zvonimir Mihanovic, Bernard Gantner, André Bourrie, Claude Gaveau, Gaston Sebire, Beltran Bofill, Constantin Kluge, Claude Cambour, André Vignoles, Yolande Ardissone, Frederick McDuff, Louis Fabien, Jean-Pierre Dubord, Annette Ollivary

Post Impressionist and Modern Masters
Monday through Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (212) 421-5390
NEW YORK • PARIS • CHICAGO • PALM BEACH



The quest

Hand-Painted Pop: An
How? Why? And the big
freedom. Questioning the
day. Hold on tight--this
transitional period betwee
as we know it. Expressiv
Puzzling. Works by Hart
Rauschenberg, Rivers, Ru
the seven years that creat
art. And get a grasp on th

Whitney M
July
For inform

PHILIP MO

Supporting

IBM

