

Southern Baptist Hospital • Spring / Summer 1993

SPECTRUM

Collector

Frederick Weisman

Revels in Louisiana

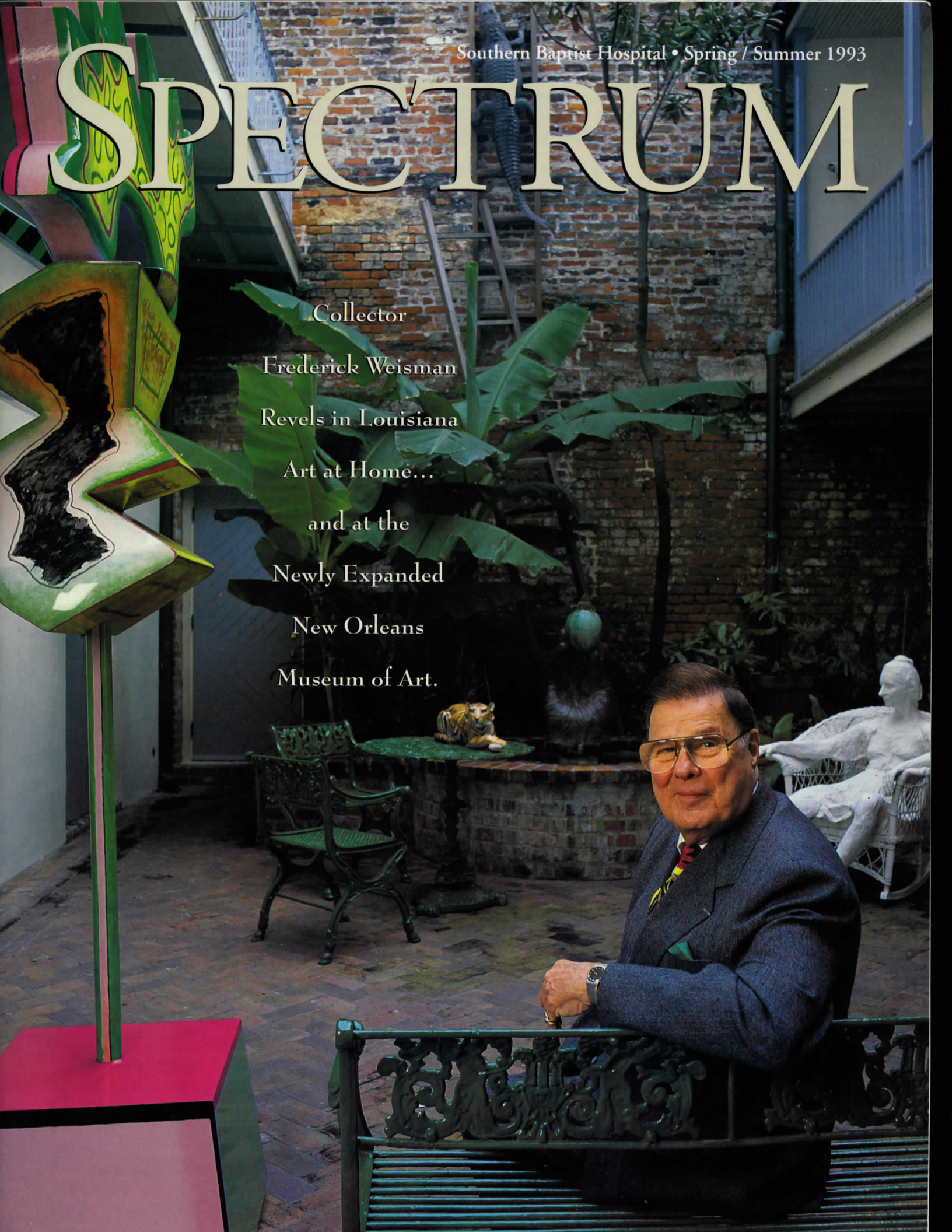
Art at Home...

and at the

Newly Expanded

New Orleans

Museum of Art.



Almost two centuries' worth of Bayou State art will hold court in three separate galleries at the newly expanded New Orleans Museum of Art.

"People coming to the city are interested in New Orleans and Louisiana. They (the city and state) have a unique personality. It's not just the food and the music; it's also the visual arts that has that special quality," says NOMA director John Bullard.

The museum, custodian of one of the state's largest collections of Louisiana art, will devote three sequential galleries in the rear Zemurray Wing [formerly the City Wing]

to the works of native sons and daughters. By museum standards, it's a bold move, says Bullard.

"There are very few museums where you can see a nice grouping of work that's being

done in that particular area, or region, or city, with the obvious exception of New York," he says, noting museums' fear of the 'provincial' tag. "There's been a tendency for most museums to think they're too sophisticated for that."

On permanent view will be Louisiana paintings, sculpture and decorative arts from 1800 to present.

The George L. Viavant Gallery will feature works by Louisiana portraitists,

mal still life artist George L. Viavant. The works, typified by subjects such as dead game hanging on a nail, recall a painting tradition with roots in 17th-century Holland. The style was popular among 19th-cen-

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landscape painters and still life artists, including those by the state's post-1865 boom of landscape artists—such as Richard Clague Jr. and William Henry Buck. The gallery is named after late-19th-, early 20th-century ani-

ture Louisiana painters who were inspired by the state's connection to the bayou, the marsh and the hunt.

The Entergy Corporation Gallery will focus on painting, sculpture and decorative arts produced in Louisiana and the



NOMA's collection includes fine works by American artists, among them the 1963 Ada in Aqua, oil on canvas by Alex Katz.

tangible works of art. No art museum has that," Bullard says. "Surveys show that maybe 90 percent of people who come to museums want to know more information about what they're looking at." The wing's second floor will house classrooms for adult and child art programs and a small children's gallery.

Along with picnic lunches and Storyland, Bullard sees the new NOMA as yet another attraction certain to lure families to City Park. He notes that one's first exposure to museums is typically during childhood.

"Usually you come into a museum and it's, 'Be quiet. Don't talk. Don't

touch. Don't. Don't. Don't. Don't,'" he says. "We want to make the museum user-friendly. A lot of people come in and they're sort of intimidated by the museum. They feel, 'I don't have any knowledge, or I'm not going to be welcomed.' Hopefully, we'll be able to make them feel more comfortable and allow them to gain a much richer experience from seeing these works."

Now that the average visit to the museum might be three hours long, project designers have made every attempt to maximize the building's non-exhibit options. A new gift shop—three times the size of the original—will boast the city's largest selection of art books, as well as jewelry, T-shirts, children's games and craft materials. The new Courtyard Cafe, an elegant buffet-style restaurant spilling out onto a landscaped courtyard, will serve up soups, sandwiches, salads, teas, coffees and pastries, and offer views of an adjacent lagoon and bronze gates created by New Orleans artists George Dureau and Ery (Schwartz).

While the museum hopes to grab the attention of the city's 5 million annual

Middle-South during the first half of the 20th century. The centerpiece of the gallery will be paintings and watercolors from Newcomb School artists William and Ellsworth Woodward. NOMA's substantial collection of Newcomb Pottery will be housed here, as will works by French Quarter-based post-war artists such as Clarence Millet and John McCrady.

The Frederick R. Weisman Gallery for Contemporary Louisiana Art will be devoted to art executed in the state over the last 20 years. It will include works by contemporary artists such as Robert



Frederick Weisman finds pleasure in the art which graces his French Quarter home—and at NOMA, site of the new Frederick Weisman Gallery which showcases contemporary Louisiana art.

Gordy, Ida Kohlmeyer, Lin Emery and Lynda Benglis. It will also include the works of self-taught artists, such as Clementine Hunter and Sr. Gertrude Morgan.

"Louisiana has been very rich in those kinds of artists," Bullard says, predicting that the indigenous groupings will impress both tourists and natives alike.

"We have great pride in the artists who have worked here in Louisiana over a 150- to 200-year period. Their art works are worth seeing—and seeing them in their own context only enriches the experience."

tourists—Bullard predicts that NOMA's annual attendance of 150,000 will mushroom to 250,000—the city's people will not be forgotten. Three million of the \$23 million raised during the museum's development campaign has been placed into an endowment fund to ensure the museum's future viability.

"I would hope that the people of New Orleans will take pride in the fact that we have a first-rate zoo, a first-rate aquarium and now a first-rate museum," Bullard says. "I hope they'll begin to say, 'We don't have to go to New York or Los Angeles or Chicago to enjoy fine art. We have a wonderful museum right here.'

"I want natives to feel that we've been able to provide the city with a really first-class cultural, recreational, educational facility that is welcoming all citizens," Bullard continues. "Museums have an image nationally of being kind of elitist institutions, places only the rich can enjoy, where they give their money and have their parties. There's a misconception that you have to have a lot of background and knowledge to be able to appreciate what's there. We're always working to break

French artist Claude Monet titled this 1883 work, soon to hang in the NOMA expansion, Houses on the Old Bridge at Vernon.

down those negative feelings that people have about museums."

Amid the opening excitement, the director will be quietly celebrating his 20th anniversary as NOMA chief. Looking back, he credits the 1977 visit of an Egyptian boy-king for the museum's present dimensions.

"King Tut focused the community's attention on the museum in a way that had never been done before," Bullard said. "The expansion of the museum—despite the fact that it's been 16 years—is a result of the success we had with Tut. We've built on that."

The New Orleans Museum of Art celebrates the grand opening of its expansion April 18, 1993. Special activities include hourly arts tours, door prizes, live



music and other entertainment.

The museum is open from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday; closed on Mondays and all legal holidays. Admission is \$6 for adults, \$3 for children and senior citizens. Louisiana residents are admitted to the museum free of charge on Thursdays from 10 a.m.-noon. Annual memberships are available; the cost is \$30 per year for individuals, \$50 for families and \$15 for full-time students. For more information, call (504) 488-2631.

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