

Murphy's framework for generosity

Article from: The Boston Globe (Boston, MA) Article date: October 19, 1994

Author: Christine Temin, Globe Staff

The line "frame donated by Stanhope Framers, Inc.," occurs over and over again in the catalog for ARTcetera '94, the art auction to benefit the AIDS Action Committee, which takes place this Saturday in the lobby of International Place. Stanhope is owned by David Murphy, who has framed -- for free -- 150 of the 300 works that will go on the block, everything from a large and luscious pastel streetscape by Wade Zahares to an exquisite abstract monprint by Rob Moore, a much-loved Boston artist and teacher who died of AIDS in 1992. Murphy's generosity doesn't stop with giving thousands of dollars worth of frames to ARTcetera: He's also a big purchaser at the event, which means he sometimes donates frames and then buys them back.

Although he wouldn't say so himself, Murphy has been instrumental in the extraordinary success of ARTcetera, which raised \$100,000 in its first edition, back in 1985, and has grown steadily. The last ARTcetera, two years ago, brought in \$262,000, and while the goal this year is \$260,000, Murphy would love to see the amount soar even higher.

He has lavish praise for AIDS Action, the oldest and largest AIDS service organization in New England. "Their services are amazing," he says. "I've called their service line for friends, and the response is phenomenal. If you need to know where to go for medical attention, or if you need food, or just someone to talk to, they're right there." Murphy has a friend in New Jersey who is very sick with AIDS; after the friend got the run-around from New York service organizations, Murphy suggested he call Boston's AIDS Action Committee. "They guided him long distance," Murphy says.

As ARTcetera has grown over the past decade, so has Murphy's business. He started in 1970, fresh out of Rutgers University, where he'd studied painting and art history while working as a framer part time. Moving to Boston, he set up shop by himself, in a basement on Stanhope Street. Nearly a quarter-century later he has 25 employees, a branch on Marlborough Street in the Back Bay and a 14,000-square-foot facility in Somerville. "A framer's fantasy," he calls it, "with windows on all sides -- and parking." Here he can create virtually any sort of frame for a clientele that includes major museums and collectors across the country. For the current Sol LeWitt show at the Museum of Fine Arts, for instance, he framed giant watercolors -- some 14 feet across -- covering them with vast sheets of plexiglass. "Ten years ago, if you needed plexi that size, you'd special-order it and wait a year," he marvels. "Now, it's a stock item."

Murphy has fun with framing. Witness his favorite frame in this year's ARTcetera, a hefty silver metal job surrounding a reworked photograph by artist Lisa Young. "I made a frame that looked like something right out of a welder's shop," he says proudly. "It's all beat up."

"Among custom framers, we're the largest in New England," he says, "which means ARTcetera is doable for me." He folds the making of ARTcetera frames into his company's schedule, year-round. His contribution to the cause started small, though, in 1985, when someone on the auction committee called in a last-minute panic and asked if he could mat and frame a few works. He could.