PLATFORMS

# <u>Agitate</u> then <u>Negotiate</u>:

# Artifacts from the life of Helen Sargent Hitchcock

# Andrew Shurtz



1 Helen Sargent Hitchcock. Photographer unknown, ca. mid-1920s. From the Bulletin of the Art Center, 1926.

## 2

I discovered this scrapbook at a Brooklyn flea market in 2012 and was instantly intrigued by its collection of handwritten condolence letters, obituaries and personal histories. Scrapbooks often commemorate happy events; this one focused solely on tragedy. I later learned it belonged to the Sargent family of New England and felt compelled to piece together their story. The father, Charles Chapin Sargent, was a prominent importer of druggists' sundries and the sole North American representative for the famed Parisian brand Roger & Gallet. The family was living comfortably in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1876 when they lost two of their three young daughters to illness. Grace, age 4, succumbed to diphtheria in May. Emily, age 7, died from "congestion of the brain" in October. Helen was only six years old at the time. It is possible this early introduction to unexpected loss and suffering inspired the great sense of urgency and compassion that would drive her later work. Helen lived to become an important advocate for women in the arts and helped to catalyze the modern design industry in New York, but her efforts remain largely unknown today.



2 Scrapbook belonging to the family of Charles Chapin Sargent. Collection of the author.

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3 Archival box, Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

3

Helen donated this collection of personal papers to the Columbia University Library in 1947. Its main focus is on materials from her late husband, James Ripley Wellman Hitchcock. (Hitchcock was an influential literary editor famous for his extensive and successful re-workings of popular novels, namely Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage and Edward Noyes Westcott's David Harum.) Helen married Hitchcock in 1914; she was 43 years old at the time and had never been married.

The collection consists of 26 boxes. Of these, only the first seven (selected correspondence) have been catalogued and filed. The remaining 19 boxes consist mostly of materials belonging to Helen's husband and brother. Helen's personal archive was squeezed in to just three boxes and left unsorted. These boxes include documents and ephemera relating to the various groups she founded: the Art Workers' Club for Women, the Art Alliance of America, the Art Center of New York, and the National Alliance of Art and Industry. The library identifies them simply as "a group of materials relating to the American Art Alliance in which Mrs. Hitchcock was interested," belying the breadth and importance of their contents.

Note: The New York Historical Society has a small collection of Art Center ephemera and a few handwritten drafts of Helen's speeches, but the Hitchock archive is far more broad and comprehensive of all of Helen's activities.

#### 4

This article was prepared in 1925 during the Art Center's fundraising drive for a planned expansion. In it, Helen outlines her history of founding art societies, beginning with the Art Workers Club for Women in 1898. The club served to HE GENERAL MANAGER TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTO OF THE ART ALLIANCE OF AMERICA SUPTEMBER 26 TO AMERICA

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own student days at the Art Students' League for the germ of the idea. But she pointed out that as no organization can be built without the friendly cooperation of a group of men and women who make personal sacrifices for it, so the devotion of the members of the Board and Committees and other active workers as well as the cooperation of a large number of public citizens who had given generously of their support, had brought the Art Center to pass. Ich, had much the case problem to face in helping young "The models who were posing for our drawing and painting classes seemed wretchedly unhappy" said Mrs. Hitchcock. in telling of her League days. "My interest in them was so great that I couldn't keep my mind upon my painting. I wanted to help them. One girl looked particularly dejected. I talked to her and found her as sick in soul as she was in body. I found I could help her and after her, many others. One of two alternatives seemed to me imperative. Either the profession of posing must be dignified, or we must not use models. Their position in a sort of shadowland beyond respectability seemed to me intolerable. "Out of these contacts grew the Art Workers' Club for Women, now at 152 West 57th Street, where Artists and Models met in a friendly way and many found the encouragement and companionship they needed. A successful and useful club for 27 byears, it has done much to dignify the work of the professional model and has established a department where positions for posing are made and vocational guidance given. "Through this Club, I came to know artists and craftworkers of all kinds throughout New York and brought many of them in touch with people who were interested in buying their pictures

4 "The Art Center", ca. 1925-26. Author unknown. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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ON THE VOCATIONAL LEAGUE FOR ART WORKERS 224 WEST 58TH STREET NEW YORK CITY belan investigating the needs in the hat th NCE CURTIS ls(a This was the holing of the allace rd Mapden B ffici of blues hers bser My dear A plan is now under consideration to organize a Vocational League for Art Workers in New York City, through which too women in the arts and crafts may find opportunities for work. Such a league would be in the nature of a vocational bureau to make it possible for the right worker to find the right place without so much waste of time, energy and money as is now inevitable. The various art clubs have all rendered valuable service along this line. Ivoca According to the new plan they would now unite in a larger organization with a governing board, representing men and women who have ts th gained distinction in the arts in New York. Before working out the plan further, we are eager to have the opinions of many who are engaged in various forms of art work in New York City. Will you not write us your comments on the plan and give us any facts of experience which will show us whether or not such an organization is needed? It will help us greatly if you will answer the questions on the following page. The Art Worker's Club for Women, (Signed) President -- Miss Constance Curtis. The Studio Club of New York, President -- Mrs. Stephen Baker. The Three Arts Club, President--Mrs. John Henry Hammond. The MacDowell Club, President -- Frederick A. Stokes. General hunters heat aut in a hay- and over a lander cutturany ela 6 Questionnaire and sample response, The Committee on The Vocational League for Art Workers, 1913. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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THE COMMITTEE

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MR. SARGENT: I think I know less now than I did at the last meeting.

MISS SARGENT: Mr. Adams, could you be a member of this committee?

- 23 -

MR. ADAMS: I do not feel that I know enough about it and I really have not the time.

MR. SARGENT: You see, Madam Chairman, we really know only of the work in our own respective fields and do not know anything of the other ones.

MISS SARGENT: Mrs. Henderson, will you serve on this committee?

MRS. HENDERSON: I do not feel that I can do it.

MISS SARCENT: Then, Mrs. Hopkins, would you be willing to be a member?

MRS. HOPKINS: I think you could find someone who has more time.

MR. SARGENT: Miss Van Kleeck knows very definitely what she wants to accomplish. And then this lady who read the paper dealt with the most fundamental facts.

MISS SARGENT: Then, if satisfactory, I will appoint on the committee, Miss Van Kleeck, Miss Grimble, Miss Newman, Mrs. Henderson and myself.

We will draw up some definite plan, and then, Mr. Sargent, what do you think would be the next step?

MR. SARGENT: Decide what you are going to do, propose some definite move which you can make, -even if it is outrageous. My motion was to present a statement, preferably in writ-

5 Minutes from a meeting concerning the creation of the Vocational League for Art Workers, 1913. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

1 Author unknown, "The Art Center", ca. 1925-26. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

Questions to be answered, detatched, and forwarded to the chairman, MISS HELEN SANBORN SARGENT 224 West 58th Street New York City Black and white and color 1. What is your field of work? for reproduction - most of it for commercial work use 2. What was your training? Design, composition, sketch Students Leagues in Washington, D.C. as a child. academic in Concoran art Sebool Washington. One year in School of applied Design for bomen 3. How did you obtain your first paid work? on the teaching staff of a boarding s which led to better portions. 4. In what way did you obtain work in New York City? While get a months work drafting in an underwriters office downtowy the an acquaintance who had to leave the work to we Suras will to risk passing exams at the and of the solorly can (Ta Sate, hun is a teaching vacator, got seven commercial drawning to do for angles 5. Will your favor us with any suggestions regarding the proposed Vocational Lea year Tassed Art Workers? work is still sufficiently chaotic to keep me from having any very help to offer. I fear. But. generally sp lavor of is nearly all of arecord Dano

6 Questionnaire and sample response, The Committee on The Vocational League for Art Workers, 1913. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

legitimize and elevate the work of female artists' models, to help further the careers of female artists, and to help bridge connections between both groups. It provided temporary residences, hot meals and tea, meeting rooms where female artists and models could socialize, and a placement bureau to help members find work. d women employed in the applied arts and received hundreds of interesting responses, a handful of which survive in Helen's archive. The women outlined hot they received their education in the arts and how they found work in their chose fields. Their comments about the struggle to find steady, well-paying work af-

As Helen outlines in this document, she was greatly disturbed by the condition of the artists' models while attending the Art Students' League in New York. "One girl looked particularly dejected. I talked to her and found her as sick in soul as she was in body. I found I could help her and after her, many others." Helen's desire to ease the suffering of the artists' models set her forth on a path to aid arts workers of all types and unify workers in the creative industries in pursuit of their common goals.

### 5

Two typewritten pages are all that remain of the minutes from a meeting Helen led in 1913. After the success of the Art Workers' Club, Helen set out to create an organization that would provide employment for female art workers of all kinds. The man referred to in this transcript as "Mr. Sargent" is Helen's father, Charles. The woman referred to as "Ms. Sargent" is Helen herself. Helen is commonly identified by her father's surname (Sargent) or her husband's (Ripley Hitchcock). It is rare to see the name of Helen in print. Charles' influence as both a benefactor and guide is made very clear here; Helen's persistence and ability to unite a team is even more clear.

### 6

The Vocational League's first act was to survey female art workers and determine if and how the league could benefit them. They sent questionnaires to hundreds

of women employed in the applied arts and received hundreds of interesting responses, a handful of which survive in Helen's archive. The women outlined how they received their education in the arts and how they found work in their chosen gle to find steady, well-paying work after an arts education would be familiar to any contemporary worker in the creative industries. The league used this information to enlist a number of prominent New York art schools and artists in the creation of the Art Alliance of America. While the Vocational League was created specifically to help women artists, its mandate was expanded to aid artists of both genders. The Art Alliance sought to connect working artists and art students with manufacturers, publishers, and other possible employers, all with the goal of ultimately raising the quality of American applied art.

The Art Alliance's New York office expanded to a number of different states across the country. Notably, their Chicago office became (after a series of name changes) the Association of Arts and Industries, the group responsible for bringing László Moholy-Nagy to the United States to direct the New Bauhaus.

#### 7a–b

As the influence of the Art Alliance grew, it quickly developed a need for a permanent headquarters. Helen was also driven by what she saw as wasted energy from the duplicated efforts of New York's innumerable art societies. "Why not bring together all these various associations, where they could share expenses, experience and resources and combine energies to create in America a background of decorative art reflective of its own mode of life, and to form an art spirit and an art appreciation which should extend to all the people?"1

A committee was formed in 1920



7a Get Together and DO IT, Reverse of postcard, 1920. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

to find interested societies. The postcard shown (6a) is an invitation to the first major meeting. It was held at the house of Mrs. John Henry Hammond, an influential art patron, member of the Vanderbilt family, president of the Three Arts Club, and mother of the legendary record producer John Hammond. The postcard shows the spirit of cooperation and group effort that Helen hoped to encourage: "Get together and DO IT!"

The list of interested societies formed rapidly: the Art Alliance, the Pictorial Photographers of America, the Society of Illustrators, the New York Society of Craftsmen, and the newly-formed Art **Directors Club.** (During early planning stages, both the Tiffany Foundation and the Society of Jewelry Designers considered membership.) With the addition of the American Institute of Graphic Arts and the Stowaways, the final roster was set. Two adjoining buildings were purchased on 56th could be exposed to the work of Man Ray street and renovated to provide permanent meeting spaces for each society, along with shared exhibition space that would be open

to the public. The Art Center Inc. was incorporated to run the whole enterprise, and Helen was named president.

The slogans used in the company's **Provisional Programme (6b) illustrate the** spirit and enthusiasm that drove their early efforts: "Don't forget to agitate. Don't forget to negotiate." 8

Each organization was greatly advanced by the shared energies of the Art Center, and each came to national prominence more swiftly as a result. The AIGA, in particular, was able to fund touring exhibitions like the Fifty Books of the Year and an annual medal of achievement thanks to support from the Art Center. These groups not only supported one other but also influenced each other in both direct and indirect ways. The Center's galleries and meeting rooms were spaces where a designer like Frederic Goudy (one-time president of the AIGA) (member of the Pictorial Photographers) and encounter the personal work of Grace Drayton (creator of the Cambpell's

#### ART CENTER'S Provisional Programme ---AGITATE then NEGOTIATE

Many schemes have been evolved for elevating the masses, but they have utterly failed in their purpose unless there has been a previous development of character and mind which were capable of wisely using the opportunities thus made available. As a result, when we are confronted with an industrial, moral or social problem we turn to education as essential to its solution.

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Although education is the perfection of the individual, yet there are certain fundamental principles, which are conceded, should be taught to all, and certain elements which should be developed and made a potent force in the character of the individual, which will, advance not only to his own welfare and betterment, but also to that of his neighbor.

Now to the point; ART CENTER!

ART CENTER Inc.

ART CENTER is an Institution.

ART CENTER is an American Institution.

ART CENTER is the Clearing House for ART in Industry. ART Center is an educational institution cooperating,

in the broader sense, for the good and welfare of the home and everything pertaining to home life.

ART CENTER has proved its needful purpose, its worthiness, its absolute necessity for having come into the field to occupy a position which the public demand. And, therefore; has made its initial step.

7b Art Center provisional programme, ca. early 1920s. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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8 Art Center main gallery. Photographer unknown, ca. mid-late-1920s. From an Art Center Brochure. (Title TK)

Soup Kids and member of the Society of Illustrators).

#### 9

In 1922, the Art Center and its seven societies were all invited to participate in the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Arts in Washington, DC. There, an audience of over 1200 assembled to hear speeches from the most prominent museums, art organizations, and educational institutions in the country. One of the esteemed speeches given was written by Helen Sargent Hitchcock. This document is an early draft of that speech (later titled "Industrial Art as a Personal Responsibility"). The speech was delivered in Helen's absence by Mrs. John Henry Hammond. In the speech, Helen outlines her view of art and design as a moral force, able to beautify not just the home but also the spirit of every American. "The effect of such environment of the industrial arts, upon our character, will indicate definitely, as it has in previous chapters of the history of the race, that the fate of the nation lies not in the hands of

the warriors and statesmen, but in those of our designers and workmen, and in those who guide our industries, and in those who purchase them.

#### 10

Each of the seven societies were united in their day-to-day activities by the Art Center building itself. They all, however, had their own individual agendas. The Art Alliance of America sought to help artists of all kinds find employment and navigate the commercial art industry, to help employers find talented art workers, and help art students find the proper course of study. The Society of Illustrators sought to advance what was then called "commercial art", namely illustration for books, advertisements or posters. The Art Directors Club intended, according to early member Earnest Calkins, "to dignify the field of business art in the eyes of artists, to encourage the best men to undertake it, and to regard it while undertaking it as the greatest job in the world."2 The American Institute of Graphic Arts, at this point, chiefly concerned itself with the promotion

essay title

2 E.E. Calkins, "Advertising Art", Camera Craft Vol. XXVIII, Feb. 1921, p. 61



To-day there is a remainsance of the Art of the Home. We see this revival everywhere, in the building on a large scale of so-called model homes" which are designed to be attractive as well as liveable; in exhibitions all over the country where are shown ways aid means to make the home beautiful, whether it be a house on a great avenue, or a tiny flat, or in a suburban development which makes much of light and air and of natural beauty. Interior decorators, and also those in department stores, and those guiding the magazines of the home, and instructors in the Art Schools, both private and public, all are working in their way for more attractive decoration. They are not only designing for the rich, but for those of moderate means, and for those in the simplest homes, realizing that an artistic environment is our rightful heritage

This awakened interest in the objects which make up the daily scene are an outward expression of an inward and spiritual grace. More and more in the products of industry is the impulse toward beauty, and by such consideration it will ultimately pervade everything we see and touch.

All industrial art is Art, but allied to business, and industrial art is a part of our very life. People speak of commercial art. There is no such dividing line in Art, and artists are working in every constructive field of design.

We have no longer the lack of popular appreciation of Industrial Art by the unresponsiveness of the public. This general appreciation is being constantly developed. When we realize personal responsibility to make our homes lovely and use every influence to make schools more attractive; to encourage Art in Trade Schools, and encourage the best art exhibitions and interest in Art organizations, and also further a crusade for "art for all people", then full appreciation will come to pass. Training children early through art is necessary to training for good citizenship, for a love of beauty in the home is where the seeds are planted.

9 Art as a personal responsibility, draft of speech by Helen Sargent Hitchcock, ca. 1921-1922. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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10. Art Center floor plans, From an Art Center Brochure, 1922, (Title TK)



11 American Institute of Graphic Arts, November Meeting invitation, 1922. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library

3 Albert Schiller, "American Institute of Graphic Arts", Bulletin of the Art Center, Vol. III No. 5, March 1925, p. 183 4 Author unknown, "The Art Center", ca. 1925-26. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

5 Michele H. Bogart, Advertising, Artists, and the Borders of Art. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

6 Albert Schiller, "American Institute of Graphic Arts", Bulletin of the Art Center, Vol. III No. 6, February 1925, p. 154

of fine book printing and typography. A characteristic lecture given by Carl **Purington Rollins of the Yale University** Press in 1925 was entitled "Is commercial printing worth doing well? No."3 The New York Society of Craftsmen focused on hand-made domestic and industrial works but emphasized beauty over commercial America advocated for a modern approach to photography that could exist both in the gallery and in the commercial world of advertising. The Stowaways had no public agenda and seemed to do little more than serve as a semi-mysterious VIP club for prestigious male members of the other societies. **Despite these differences**, Helen's

ultimate goal for the Art Center was one of cooperation. "Of course we met with opposition, for artists are individualists. But there were a great number who felt that the big thing for which we were all working faced great financial difficulties. It supcould be best accomplished by combining our interests. And this has proved true, even beyond our expectations. The fact that relied on donations, some from its origithe Art Center brings together so many diversified lines gives it a sort of cumulative force. And as it has worked out, each society has kept its individuality, while our corporate interests have been greatly strengthened by combining."4

### 11

As this invitation illustrates, the inclusion of women was not a given at AIGA events in 1922. The Art Center was founded and led by women with a history of working to further the cause of women in the arts. The Art Alliance, Society of Illustrators, and Pictorial Photographers all allowed female members. The founder of the **Pictorial Photographers, Clarence White,** famously mentored a number of successful

female photographers including Margaret Bourke-White, Margaret Atkins, and Dorothea Lange. Not all of the Art Center's seven societies were that progressive, however. As Michele Bogart writes, "on a dayto-day basis the center appeared less like a placement bureau than like an elite men's club that melded business with social life. aspirations. The Pictorial Photographers of Women were behind the inception and operation of the center, but their actual power and presence, and to some extent their priorities, were eclipsed."5 After five years of working with progressive societies that did include female members, the AIGA reluctantly allowed women to join in 1925. In the Bulletin of the Art Center, they made their announcement with the caveat: "But what will come of this chivalrous action it is hard to say."6

### 12

During the depression, the Art Center ported itself only partially by dues and rent from the seven societies and otherwise nal founding and some from a large fundraising drive in 1925. By 1931, the Center was imperiled enough to commission an independent audit from the firm of Mark Jones. The preliminary report, shown here, exhaustively details the many problems of the Center's structure. Each society operated independently of the main organization and treated it largely as a source of office space. The Center's finances were complex and poorly documented, with a large amount of funds raised in the form of bonds. The report recognized the importance of the Art Center's mission but saw only one possible way to salvage it: the Art Center would have to dissolve to allow the seven societies to continue. The Art Center became an entity that controlled only the



#### April 3, 1981

Mr. Richard de Wolfe Brixey, President, Art Contor, Incorporated, 65 Rant 56th Street, New York, E.Y.

Dear Mr. Brizey:

After a study of Art Center, Incorporated, extended over a period of several weeks, it has seemed desirable that we depart from the usual custom and present what we shall have torm a preliminary report. That is offered is tentative in the full sense of the term and subject to reconsideration as soon as information not yet available eem be taken into account.

A report of this nature must be limited to matters of practical significance and therefore must be quite out of proportion. It may appear to assess dobits without listing offsetting credits and I affer this note of warning in that regard with the hope that something of belancing mature may thus be added.

Despite all difficulties and shortcomings, we definitely feel that Art Center, Incorporated has made progress, has accomplianed a great deal of genuine value, and has far more to its credit on the achievement side than could appear from a report, the purpose of which is not at all historical. At the same time, anyone considering meds to an contrasts the obvious conclusion that Art Center, Im or preside and the aggregation of effort that it brings together represents little more than a beginning and that the opportunity still lies shead. Much pioneering work and a great deal of experimental effort have been done of mecessity, and moreover the project probably must continue in the pioneering stage for some time and at least until a more stable basis can be established.

We hope this preliminary report will be sufficient to anable those interested to act upon the questions of immediacy that naturally require attention at the outset. In due course we can consider the preparation of a final and official report.

It is a source of pleasure that we are able to express our appreciation of the wholehearted cooperation given us by all concerned and I am gled to take this means of expressing thanks to the many who have been so helpful.

Very trely yours, Signed Mark M. Jones

12 Art Center 1931 Economic Audit Preliminary Report. Prepared by Mark M. Jones, Consulting Economist. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

ART CENTER, INCORPORATED

Viewing the situation in a broad way, it appears that the efforts put forth by Art Center, Incorporated and its affiliated societies have accomplished much of value since the Art Center was organized in 1920. However, it seems clear from an outside point of view that the potential possibilities in the situation have not sufficiently been realized upon to give assurance that the outlays made are duly in proportion to results secured. Although no adequate formal definition of purpose for the Art Center appears to have been made, the informally professed aims of promoting art in industry and the everyday affairs of the people point to a need of outstanding importance and promise today, and one that probably will continue to be of importance for years to come. The programs of Art Center, Incorporated and the societies are not clearly defined and the work is essentially opportunistic. The whole structure situation presents a maze of complexities involving as it does a business corporation operating not for profit, bonds, stocks, a voting trust agreement, a board which interlocks with seven other organizations, and an employed staff. Beyond this the organization has built up a small membership corresponding to that of a membership corporation and also, according to legal interpretation, has an endowment. The financial condition of Art Center, Incorporated is precarious to say the least. The financial and accounting records are inadequate and largely meaningless. There is no adequate financing policy and Art Center, Incorporated is therefore leading a hand to mouth financial existence. This report should be regarded as preliminary in the full sense of the

term inasunch as endeavors over an extended period have not yet produced satis-

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12 Art Center 1931 Economic Audit Preliminary Report. Prepared by Mark M. Jones, Consulting Economist. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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13 Alon Bement, letter to Helen Sargent Hitchcock, 1935. Ripley Hitchcock Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.



14 The Art Center Seal, designed by Edward B. Edwards, 1923. From the Bulletin of the Art Center, Vol. 1, No. 11, June 1923.

building itself, while the Art Alliance was combined with the promotional efforts of the Center to become a new organization, the National Alliance of Art and Industry or NAAI. This move was drastic, but it allowed each of the organizations to survive. The societies continued to use the building until 1933, when the NAAI moved to its of Virginia. new headquarters in the R.C.A. building at **Rockefeller Center.** Though the Art Center itself was dissolved, its contributions were solvent enough to be noted by the auditor: "There is an outstanding need, nationwide in its proportions, for more art in industry in everyday affairs. No agency appears to be giving much attention to the satisfaction of this need and Art Center, Incorporated appears to have done more in this field than other agencies."

#### 13

In 1935, Alon Bement resigned as president of the NAAI. He had been appointed director of the Art Center in 1926, after a grant from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. made funding such a position possible. Bement 133 had a varied and impressive career before helming the Art Center. He taught at Columbia University, designed ship camouflage for the US in WW1, served as director of the Maryland Institute, and even influenced a young Georgia O'Keefe while leading a summer course at the University of Virginia.

In this letter addressed to Helen, Alon outlines the many challenges that plagued them in their "ten year struggle against disheartening circumstances." He also recounts a number of the ways in which they had succeeded against the odds. The attitude of society and industry toward visual appearance had improved. The perceived value of designers had increased. The number of design educational institutions had grown. And, "Art workers" operating in disparate fields came to be known collectively as "designers."

### 14

"The seal of the Art Center is expressive of its unity and is in the form of a modified seven-pointed star, consisting of an endless line, so interlaced as to make seven units which form a center"

The Art Center was undermined by several contradictions at its core. It was an organization founded by women but controlled by men, motivated by progressive ideas about social reform but intent upon serving capitalist goals of industry. Seven societies came together to form this collective unit but still maintained their individual aims and identities. The Art Center was more than an alliance but less than a governing body. Some saw it as simply a building or a glorified landlord. As a result of these unresolved tensions, the Center's mission is little known today. But, its opposing forces and motivations also contributed to its strength. Each member society benefitted from the influence of the others and the social, cultural, and artistic support that the Center provided. Helen succeeded in exposing these organizations to different philosophies, goals, and operations at a crucial time in the history of the design industry. A man may have been able to wield more influence, but it is clear that such an unlikely organization could never have existed without the specific vision and perseverance of Helen herself.