

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
January 1986

BERNARD KARPEL

Bernard Karpel, former Chief Librarian of The Museum of Modern Art, died on January 8, 1986, at his home in Coconut Creek, Florida. He was seventy-four years old. Mr. Karpel was renowned for his innovations in the field of art librarianship. During his thirty-year tenure at the Museum (1942-1973) he transformed its library into an internationally recognized resource.

Mr. Karpel was an art librarian at one of the branches of the New York Public Library prior to joining the staff of the Museum as Acting Librarian. He replaced Beaumont Newhall who left to serve in the United States Air Force. In 1945 Mr. Newhall returned to the Museum as Curator in the Department of Photography, and the following year Mr. Karpel became the first professional librarian to head the Museum's library.

By 1939 the library at the Museum had become distinguished as the largest in the United States devoted exclusively to modern art. Mr. Karpel continued to build its resources and to enhance its reputation through his associations with artists, scholars, and colleagues, his skill as a brilliant bibliographer, and his diligent acquisition of both rare and basic manuscript collections and art publications.

One of Mr. Karpel's major contributions to the field of librarianship-- as well as to art-historical scholarship--was the introduction of substantial bibliographies into exhibition catalogs. During his professional life he completed over one hundred bibliographies on modern art.

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In addition to his impact at the Museum, Mr. Karpel was known for his editorial achievements, particularly as editorial advisor to the Arno series, Contemporary Art; the Viking series, Documents of Twentieth Century Art; and the Wittenborn series, Documents of Modern Art. He served as a consultant to several libraries, ranging from the Soho Center for the Visual Arts in New York to libraries in Asia. He was also a faculty member and frequent lecturer at a number of prominent institutions, including Columbia University's Graduate School of Library Science, Pratt Institute's School of Library Science, and the School of Library Science at Queens College. Following his retirement from the Museum in 1973 he concentrated on editing the four-volume Arts in America: A Bibliography (1979).

Last fall the Art Libraries Society of North America announced that Mr. Karpel was chosen as the first recipient of its Distinguished Service Award, which was scheduled to be awarded to him next month at the society's fourteenth annual conference in New York. During his lifetime he received countless other professional awards, including the Award of Merit from the Philadelphia College of Art and the John D. Rockefeller II Fund Grant.

Bernard Karpel is survived by his wife, Ray, his two sons, George and Kenneth, a daughter, Mara Fahey, and three brothers.

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No. 7

For further information, contact Jeanne Collins or Jessica Schwartz,
Department of Public Information 212/708-9750.