

## BARTON'S MAGICAL PLACE

Barton Lidice Benes lived in a magical apartment in New York City. It was filled with over \$1 million in African, Egyptian, South American, Chinese and contemporary art, plus much more as touted in the *New York Times* when it announced Barton's intended gift to North Dakota (2/6/05).

Barton Benes and his treasure trove spent decades tucked away in a glorious boxcar space in Westbeth, the artist community in New York's West Village. There, rare works of art joined ranks with the arcane, the wistful, the amusing, the deeply serious, and a "maddening and morbid array of things" (a human toe found on New York's Williamsburg Bridge, a stuffed mink wearing a mink coat, an eight-foot giraffe head). This temporary installation suggests the drama and mystery embedded in Barton's private wonderland.

Barton once said, "Living in my apartment is like living in a seventeenth century curio cabinet." He continued, "My work has been attacked in British tabloids and featured on the cover of *ARTnews*. I've been fascinated by relics ever since I took a monk's bone from the catacombs in Rome in 1963. Then I went to Africa in 1970 and the real collecting began—under the guidance of dealer and friend Tom McNemar." Barton lived for sixty-nine years, always an artist, always an artist exploring what it means to be human. That is the overriding theme of his life's work and the thread running through Barton's Place, the Museum that evolved within that 850-square-foot space where he created the artworks that now grace museums and private collections around the world.

Laurel Reuter, Director of the North Dakota Museum of Art and Benes were introduced in 1987 by Harvey Hoshour, the architect who developed the plans to renovate this building, a "1907 Women's Gym" on the campus of the University of North Dakota, into the home of the North Dakota Museum of Art. His wife Lise was Barton's dealer in Albuquerque. Hoshour died before construction was complete so Reuter turned to artists to finish the building. Barton designed the Museum Shop and later the Museum's Donor Wall. The new Museum opened in 1989 with a survey exhibition of Benes' art in the Mezzanine Gallery. The *Gossip Column*, given to the Museum by the Hoshours, was in that 1989 show and is included in this installation. Other exhibitions followed in 1995 and 2004.

In 1997, the Museum commissioned Benes to create a "flood museum" comprised of metaphor-laden, flood damaged objects contributed by the people of Grand Forks. The work, twenty-four-feet long and five-feet high, is divided into eighty pigeonholes, each containing a reliquary object such as the "favorite toy of flood kitten Iris who drowned but not before moving several kittens to safety in a vent." The flood museum, *Ebb Tide*, will be installed on the outside east wall of the reconstructed apartment.

The transfer of "Barton's Place" from New York City to Grand Forks and the installation in the Museum was underwritten by Karen Stoker of Fargo with additional funding from James Cottrell and Joe Lovett, Barry and Bobbi Collier, David Hasbargen and Wayne Zimmerman, and Jerry Foote, along with many others. Barton's friends who live in Westbeth helped the Museum Staff with arrangements as they dismantled the apartment and loaded it into two twenty-six foot trucks for the trip to North Dakota. Other financial assistance came from the North Dakota Council on the Arts, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and the City of Grand Forks through a grant administered by the North Valley Arts Council.