CREATING A PLACE FOR OURSELVES: HUMBERT HOWARD, BLACK ART, AND THE PYRAMID CLUB OF PHILADELPHIA

by Bettye Collier-Thomas

> *It requires much taste, and still more means to be a patron of Arts. . .[There are many] obstacles a painter or sculptor has to contend with, and, when one of our race attempts either, he has the never ending prejudice of the dominant race to buffet him from place to place, for only a few years have elapsed since we could be admitted even as visitors, to places of art exhibitions, and at this time there are many galleries in which would not be admitted a black man or woman among the others, as a student*

William H. Dorsey's trenchant commentary, in 1877, on the struggle of African Americans to be artists, patrons of the arts, visitors to art exhibitions, and students at art galleries accurately describes the situation confronted by most nineteenth and many early twentieth-century black artists in Philadelphia. Dorsey, a landscape painter, spoke indirectly of his experiences in Philadelphia. Although the conditions he described had changed somewhat by the time of Humbert L. Howard's birth, one's opportunities as an artist or an aspirant to any profession were still defined by race, gender, and class. These variants were not set in stone; however, they are indicative of some of the obstacles confronting black artists. A few African Americans were able to surmount these difficulties and to defy the odds by the sheer force of their ambition, tenacity, or unique gifts. Humbert Howard was one of the fortunate few.

Reflecting upon his success in marketing and selling his art and his growing prominence as an artist, Howard mused, in 1970, "My art is not mercenary. It is not commercial. Yet I must support it like a wife. I prefer to buy the best materials. I prefer to work away from home, in my studio on Chestnut St." At the age of fifty-five, Howard had achieved a level of success and recognition enjoyed by few African American artists. He was known throughout the art world, not only as an accomplished artist but as one who had worked diligently for many years to promote and provide visibility for thematic black art and African American artists. In fact, perhaps one of his crowning achievements was his success in developing and publicizing the Pyramid Club's annual invitational art exhibit, which provided an artistic venue for white and black artists, whose works incorporated a Negro theme, to exhibit.

Who was Humbert Lincoln Howard, and how was he able to frame a successful career in a profession where many African Americans had failed, or, at least, never gained the prominence or recognition that Howard had? Howard was born July 12, 1915, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His mother, Ethel Howard, born in Delaware, was of mixed French and Indian heritage; his father, Humbert L. Howard, Sr., a native of Virginia, was a waiter at a restaurant in Broad Street Station. Humbert Howard married the former Beatrice Wood, a descendant of Richard Allen, a founder and the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Howards had two sons, David D. and Humbert J. Howard.

At the time of Howard's birth, Philadelphia was a thriving center for African American art and culture. At the first federal census, taken in 1790, Philadelphia had the largest free-black population in the nation. Out of a total of 1,630 Negroes, 1,420 were free and 210 were slaves. By 1900, the city's black population had expanded to 62,613 and represented the fourth largest urban-black population in the nation, exceeded only by Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and New

Orleans. In 1910, with 84,459 African Americans, Philadelphia had the fifth largest urban-black population.

The high concentration of free blacks in Philadelphia at the beginning of the nineteenth century led to the development of sophisticated community institutions and a progressive leadership. In this context, the city produced many noted abolitionists; some even gained national recognition in the early Negro Convention movement. Moreover, Philadelphia's free blacks excelled in many areas—among them, religion, art, music, education, and commerce. The city was the cultural and intellectual center of black America. Although the black community provided a supportive context in which one could develop confidence and hone one's intellectual and artistic skills, racial discrimination was still confronted in the larger society. Philadelphia, known as the city of brotherly love, was no exception to the rule. While racism was a reality, the lines were not as clearly drawn here as in the South. Many of Philadelphia's educational institutions accepted blacks as students. Henry Ossawa Tanner, one of the most celebrated black artists of this century, attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in the latter part of t the nineteenth century. There, he was harassed by his classmates, who, on one occasion, tied him to his easel and placed him in the middle of Broad Street, a busy thoroughfare.

Historically, Tanner has been the most celebrated African American artist to be associated with Philadelphia; however, he is by no means the only one. In his historical retrospective, "African American Material Culture in 19th Century Philadelphia," Steven Loring Jones speaks of the contradictions inherent in being in a city that both stimulated and restricted the development of black artists. He concludes, however, that "these painters and metalsmiths, dressmakers and cabinetmakers managed to achieve a record that stands as a beacon to the rest of the country as they built organizations and institutions for self-help and mutual uplift."

During the antebellum period, Philadelphia was home to visual artist Moses Williams; painter, printmaker, and photographer Robert Douglass; commercial artist and painter David Bustill Bowser; portraitist Alfred B. Stidum; and many other lesser known artists. It was the success and influence of these and other pioneers, as well as the advocacy of the city's articulate educational and social elites, that continuously broke down barriers. Their work paved the way for a new generation of artists to emerge in the twentieth century.

During the first decade of this century, a number of African Americans were attending the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Among them were sculptors May Howard Jackson and Meta Warrick Fuller; painter-illustrators Henry Jones and Laura Wheeler Waring; architect and artist Julian Abele; and painter Lenwood Morris. Philadelphia provided a fertile ground for artistic development. During his early years, Humbert Howard was exposed to these and other budding young artists, as well as numerous organizations and institutions that sponsored exhibitions. Moreover, he later suggested that because of family connections he was in contact with many of the black elite. He said, "I knew everybody. And I came up in a good family." He indicated that he knew the noted philosopher and writer Alain Locke personally, as well as many other individuals of note. However, Howard stated that his interest in art came very early, while sitting in an art class at school. He was intrigued by the "pictures of the Indians and urchins of Philadelphia," sketched by a youth who sat at the desk in front of him. Fascinated with the drawings, he asked the youth if he could have the artwork to take home. He took the drawings home where he mounted them on his bedroom wall.

At the age of 5, Howard moved to Chicago with his parents. Returning to Philadelphia in 1926, at the age of 11, he entered the Josephine Widener Grammar School. It was there that he took his first art class. Fortunately for Howard, he lived in a city that offered classes in art in the primary and secondary grades, and where his race did not preclude his attendance at the public schools. Few of the segregated schools in the South provided black pupils this opportunity. From that time on, Howard continued to take art classes wherever he could. In high school, he was distracted somewhat from his art as he developed into a first-rate athlete. He played right end on the football team at West Philadelphia High School. Graduating from high school, he attended Howard University on an athletic scholarship."

Humbert Howard attended Howard University from 1932 to 1934, and studied art under James Porter, the renowned artist and teacher. During his junior year, he returned home to care for his ailing mother. In Philadelphia, he attended the University of Pennsylvania in 1937, but did not graduate. Later, from 1956 to 1961, he studied art at the Barnes Foundation, in Merion, Pennsylvania. During those early years, he knew that he could not support himself working as an artist. A number of the black middle class held jobs as waiters, porters, clerks, and government workers. Even with some college education, few professional jobs, with the exception of preaching and teaching, were available to Howard, or to other educated African Americans. Frequently, jobs in the government and private sectors, and other service-related employment paid more than teaching. Many educated black males sought employment with the postal service. In 1939, Howard took the civil service exam and applied for an appointment with the U. S. Postal Service. In the interim, to support himself, he went to work with the Work Projects Administration (WPA) as a painter and ceramist. His landscape painting *Bible Stories* was one of the two WPA artworks chosen for display at the 1939 New York World's Fair. In 1940, fair officials selected another: *An August Afternoon*. This was the first of Humbert Howard's paintings to win critical acclaim.

The impact of the stock market crash of 1929 reverberated throughout the nation, ushering in an economic depression of devastating proportions. African Americans were among the first to suffer. By 1934, a number of black musicians, writers, and dramatic and fine artists had reached rock bottom, and in 1935, the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the WPA was established to provide employment. One of the goals of the FAP was to preserve the skills of artists and musicians. Although there were numerous problems—blacks complained that government agencies discriminated against them, especially in the South—some of the government projects were beneficial to African Americans, particularly in the arts.

The WPA was of tremendous importance to young artists interested in learning how to paint, sculpt, and design. Jacob Lawrence, one of the foremost black artists of the century, reflected upon its impact on his career: "I served for about eighteen months on the Federal Art Project as an easel painter. This contact with more experienced and mature artists was of incalculable help to me in my development as a painter. It was my education. "During the seventies, Romare Bearden and Ernest Chrichlow, in "The Negro Painter and Sculptor," reflected on the important role that the WPA art projects played in giving black men and women their "first real opportunity, that is, in an appreciable number to puruse *[sic]* an art career." Artists were provided materials, an opportunity to meet other artists who were similarly situated, and, most significantly, they were paid for their work. Moreover, the experience of being on the projects had a substantial impact on the careers of a number of leading black artists, including Jacob Lawrence, Charles White, Vertis Hayes, Norman Lewis, Charles Alston, and Eldzier Cortor.

The Pennsylvania WPA Federal Art Project was a statewide program that employed approximately one hundred fifty artists, primarily in the major cities. FAP artists received salaries ranging from fifteen to ninety dollars a month for performing a variety of jobs. The state project included divisions of painting, fine prints, sculpture, graphic arts, photography, exhibitions, and a technical division and index of American design. Through its extensive educational and cultural program of exhibitions and allocations, it also served small towns and rural districts. During the winter and spring of 1938–39, the state program sponsored 268 exhibitions, in which six thousand works of art were placed on display. In addition, there were mural projects, archaeological digs, art demonstrations in public schools, and donations of art to public institutions. The work of the most promising artists was featured in national and international exhibitions and displayed in some of the most prestigious galleries.

In 1939, seven of the black artists employed by Philadelphia's WPA traveled to Washington, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Baltimore, New York, San Francisco, and Boston for exhibitions. The work of Samuel Brown, John Brantley Wilder, Hewlett Brown, Dox Thrash, Raymond Steth, Franklin Syres, and Donald Peterson was viewed by thousands in those cities. Samuel Brown, art instructor at the Bok Vocational School, accepted Eleanor Roosevelt's invitation to visit the White House, where his painting *The Scrubwoman* was on display. John Brantley Wilder attended the Philadelphia Art School, the Graphic Sketch Club and the Barnes Foundation, in Merion, Pennsylvania. While serving as chairman of the local National Negro Congress Cultural Committee, Wilder arranged an exhibition of Negro art in the summer of 1938. Hewlett Brown, educated at Howard University and Philadelphia's Graphic Sketch Club, was known for his versatility, working in oil, watercolor, pastel, pencil, pen and ink, wood, and linoleum block. Dox Thrash became internationally known for his discovery of the carborundum print process, a new art medium. This was considered a major discovery, since the last important breakthrough in printmaking had come in 1796, when Alois Senefelder discovered lithography. According to Thrash, he had experimented with copper almost a decade earlier and knew there was a possibility for improving the print-making process. The WPA provided him the opportunity to experiment with the carborundum powder. As a result, he became recognized as one of America's leading black artists. Prior to employment with the WPA, he had worked as a porter, elevator operator, vaudeville performer, steward, and soldier.

Raymond Steth, Franklin Syres, Donald Peterson, Claude Clark, and Humbert Howard were among the younger black WPA artists. Steth and Clark, like Thrash, were printmakers. Steth was the first to use the double print method for making color prints on a burnished plate for his carborundum process. Clark engaged in carborundum etching, a process in which the design is drawn with acid-resistant varnish and an acid bath is substituted for burnishing. Prior to employment with the WPA, Franklin Syres had studied art at the School of Industrial Art, while he worked as a caterer. His work was exhibited at the Federal Art Gallery, in Philadelphia; the Bessemer Gallery, in Pittsburgh; and Muhlenburg College, in Allentown."

The WPA provided Humbert Howard local and national exposure. In addition to his paintings' being displayed at the New York World's Fair, his work was exhibited throughout the country; in fact, several pieces were allocated to public institutions. The acclaim received from the press coverage of his paintings at the World's Fair, and his ensuing local fame, brought him to the attention of Philadelphia's black elite, particularly Dr. Walter F. Jerrick, the founder of the Pyramid Club. This factor, as well as his class status and eloquent manner, led to his 1940 appointment as the promotional chairman of the exhibition committee of the Pyramid Club. The choice of Howard was fortunate, for his work would propel both him and the club to fame and recognition. This opportunity afforded Howard high visibility, and an opportunity to develop extensive contacts with white and black artists and art institutions. He became something of a power broker, promoting and validating black art as a subject and providing a unique and highly creditable exhibition venue for black and white artists of this genre.

Humbert Howard joined the Pyramid Club at an opportune time for him and the organization. In November 1937, the club was founded as a nonprofit organization by Jerrick. By 1952, it was recognized as Philadelphia's leading Negro social club. Beginning with ten members, in two years the organization had expanded to include two hundred of the most prominent businessmen and professionals in the city. In 1944, the Pyramid Club, having reached its membership limit of 350 members, established a waiting list for future applicants. During the early years, the "key men" in the organization were Judges Joseph H. Rainey, Alton C. Berry, Scholley Pace Alexander; attorneys Theodore Spaulding, Lewis Tanner Moore, John Francis Williams; and physicians Charles Dorsey, Woodley Wells, O. Wilson Winters, and Oscar J. Cooper. By 1945, the organizational leadership and membership read like a Who's Who in Philadelphia, and, literally, black America.

In 1937, a prime, though initially unstated, reason for the founding of the Pyramid Club was the fact that black businessmen and professionals were excluded from membership in the exclusive clubs founded by whites. The Pyramid Club provided a :place for African American professionals to meet, socialize, network, and broker deals. It had the potential to be a leadership forum that could, through informal and formal decisions, make an impact upon the political, economic, and social issues affecting blacks in Philadelphia. It is difficult to assess the influence of the Pyramid Club in these arenas; however, one can assert that during the two decades of its existence, it was acknowledged as a leader in cultural and social endeavors.

The stated purpose of the Pyramid Club was "to create a place of good fellowship as well as develop better civic life." Lauded as the first "colored" organization of its kind in Philadelphia to be totally financed by the race, the club began operations in the basement of the YMCA located on Christian Street, where it met for two years. In January 1940, it purchased a stately three-storey brownstone at 1517 Girard Avenue. The organization proudly announced that the building was purchased and furnished with cash. Limiting its financial transactions to black supporters, the club paid off the mortgage in four years, established an endowment fund, and purchased $2,500 worth of government bonds. In 1944, the organization announced that it was free of any indebtedness and had a cash bank balance of more than $5,000.

The Pyramid Club was formally dedicated and opened in October 1940. More than a thousand attended the ceremony. Within a year, it had become the recognized Mecca for Philadelphia's black bourgeoisie. The lavishly furnished building included catering facilities for parties, clubs, and lodge meetings, and special rooms for hosting music festivals, pinochle tournaments, conferences, public forums, and receptions for prominent visitors and performers. Although women were excluded from membership, spouses could join the Pyramid Wives, an auxiliary to the club. The Pyramid Wives was one of the most active groups and the organizers of a number of the club's events. Among the more popular annual events sponsored by the Wives were the annual Palm Sunday fashion revue and the annual bazaar.

Of all the social activities and events sponsored by the Pyramid Club, the most important and memorable enterprise launched by the organization was the annual invitational art exhibition. This was the club's premier event of the year. The formal opening was preceded by a private viewing and the Yankee Doodle Banquet, which opened the art exhibition. Invitations to attend the opening banquet and reception were among the most coveted in Philadelphia, especially among the black elite. Humbert Howard carefully planned the entire event, making sure that veteran black and white newspaper writers, politicians, artists, arts educators, and museum executives were chosen as guests of honor at the banquet, and that the principal speakers were the social and political power brokers in key arenas, including the arts and politics. Among the guests of honor were Marian Anderson, renowned contralto; William Dawson and Adam Clayton Powell Jr., politicians; and Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, architect of the atom bomb. Noted speakers included Dr. Alain Locke, the first black Rhodes scholar, author, and Howard University professor of philosophy (1941); E. Simms Campbell, nationally known black cartoonist (1942); Dr. Albert C. Barnes, internationally known art collector and head of the Barnes Foundation (1943); Fiske Kimball, the director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1944); Dorothy Grafly, art critic for *The Philadelphia Bulletin* (1945); Dr. Charles Wesley, president of Wilberforce University (1947); and Joseph T. Fraser, Jr., director of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1953).

Billed in 1944 as an "Art friendship gesture between Negro and white," the annual art show displayed paintings and sculptures. Recognized as an important event on Philadelphia's art schedule, "the purpose of the exhibition was to showcase American art dealing with Negro subjects, but not necessarily art rendered by black artists. The work of diverse prominent white and black artists was annually displayed in the club's gallery.

In 1941, the Pyramid Club's opening exhibition, "20th Century Negro Contemporary Artists and Memorial Paintings of Henry O. Tanner," focused exclusively on the art of black artists. Reviewing the show, one observer declared, “The perfect combination was achieved on last Sunday afternoon when breathtaking masterpieces by early and contemporary artists of the Negro race were placed on exhibition in the spacious and perfectly illuminated rooms and hallways of the Pyramid Club.” Securing a large number of Tanner’s paintings from a private white collector, Humbert Howard arranged a display of the works of well-known black artists who had distinguished themselves in the Philadelphia FAP. The paintings of John Wilder, Franklin Syres, William Tasker, Dox Thrash, Samuel Brown, Raymond Steth, Claude Clark, and Arsie Lee Kennedy were prominently shown and compared with those of Tanner.

During the first three years of its existence, the annual art exhibition was open to any artist who wished to enter the juried competition. In 1944, the Pyramid Club departed from this precedent. Announcing the decision to initiate an invitational art exhibition, Howard stated that the outbreak of the Second World War had created problems in the transporting and shipping of the art, as well as difficulties in assembling various juries. The painting jury, however, continued to function. A more important break with the club’s traditional pattern was the decision to feature the paintings of Julius Bloch, a white artist, supplemented by the work of contemporary black artists Laura Wheeler Waring, Walter Smith, Henry Jones, Humbert Howard, Dox Thrash, and Samuel Brown. Titled “The Pyramid Club Presents Negro Fine Arts,” the 1944 exhibition displayed art ranging from realism to abstraction.

Humbert Howard was the architect and chief promoter of the Pyramid Club’s integrationist theme. Although the annual art exhibition began with a celebration of black art and artists, it took Howard almost three years to convince the leadership and membership to support the idea of utilizing the club’s limited space to provide a prominent exhibition venue for white as well as black artists. Howard later admitted that it was his belief that white artists should be included in the exhibitions, adding, “I said no, the black must be—it must be black subject matter or I didn’t take the painting.” He explained the criteria for selecting artists: “So if you were white, it was black subject matter, you could handle it. It was an idea of integration. . . .It was the growth of living together, just what you see here. You didn’t have to make any excuses, you just painted well and you were selected. You were accepted by Humbert Howard, he was the art director.”

In the introduction to the 1944 exhibition catalog, Alain Locke explained the new philosophy defining the annual exhibition and the organization’s belief in integrated shows. In effect, Locke was justifying the choice of Julius Bloch, the white artist whose series of twenty-one paintings was prominently featured in the exhibition that year. Locke wrote:

> *Although the Negro as a vital part of the American scene is the common property of American artists (black and white), he is certainly the special property and a particular artistic interest and asset of the Negro artist. However, this could come about only after the Negro theme had acquired artistic dignity through the recognition of master artists and world critics. . . . We are now able to see that a white artist can be a notable exponent of Negro Art if he portrays this material with power and insight, and also to realize that Negro Art does not restrict the Negro artist to a ghetto province, but only urges him to sustain his share in its interpretation, with no obligation but the universal one of a duty to express himself in originality and unhampered sincerity.*

The theme of integration was fully addressed in the catalog and in the speech delivered by Fiske Kimball, director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Speaking on “The Negro Theme in Art,” Kimball contended that “the day has come when it is no longer thought that only colored persons can excel in portraying colored subjects. . . here is afield in which colored artists should excel. Great art results when the artist approaches his work with love, passion and deep feeling—not only for his subject, but for his calling.”

From 1944 to Humbert Howard’s departure in 1958, the paintings of such white artists as Julius Bloch, Norman Carton, :Razel Kapustin, and Edith Scarlett were hung alongside those of such black artists as Humbert Howard, Dox Thrash, Claude Clark, John Wilder, Francis Couch, Samuel Brown, Edward Loper, Beatrice Overton, and Rex Goreleigh. Sculpted works by Steve Lewis, Selma Burke, Beatrice Fenton, Angelo Frudakis, Richard Frazier, and John J. Myers were also presented. The decision to integrate the Pyramid Club's exhibitions, and to feature whites prominently as honorees and speakers, provided Howard with a special entree to the galleries, aiding him in advancing his image and art among white arts administrators, artists, and major museums, who had few dealings with African Americans.

In his planning for the Pyramid Club's yearly exhibitions, Howard carefully noted the work of artists featured in contemporary exhibitions and visited studios and galleries in Philadelphia and New York to invite entries. Although the core of artists came from Philadelphia, most of the annual events represented artists from different geographical locales. In 1955, Howard broke with tradition, expanding the selection base to include a number of well-known New York artists, and heightened the significance of the event by allotting one gallery for selections from the permanent collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Works displayed in the new gallery included *Nicodemus* by Henry O. Tanner, *Negro* by Franklin Watkins, *The Yellow Cup* by Howard, and *The Sorceress* by Darrel Austin, as well as such fine sculpted pieces as *The King* by Joseph Greenberg, Jr., and *Amazon* by Helene Sardeau. Among the African Americans selected as special guest artists were James Porter, renowned art historian and painter; Hale Woodruff, noted New York arts educator and painter; Allan Freelon, artist and educator in the art department of Philadelphia's public school system; Dox Thrash, printmaker; Paul Keene, a young interpretative painter; Selma Burke, sculptor; and Philadelphia artists Samuel Brown and John Brantley Wilder. In addition to consistently exhibiting his own art and that of Dox Thrash, Howard had a core of white artists whose works were featured annually. These included Morris Blackbum, Jack Bookbinder, Albert Gold, Dolya Goutrnan, Ben Solowey, Martin Jackson, Thomas Yerza, Roswell Weidner, and Kirk Merrick.

In 1950, at the Tenth Annual Invitation, Howard was praised by white critics, like Dorothy Grafly, for "endeavoring to establish creative interracial understanding." Grafly, art critic for *The Philadelphia Bulletin* and editor of *Art in Focus,* wrote under the title "Art and Race," that Howard and his committee members, Dox Thrash and Frank Syres, visited Philadelphia galleries regularly, looking for what they "deemed the best" as the basis for the art invitation list.
It is difficult to ascertain, but there is some intimation that Howard may have been an opportunist whose actions were determined by his perceptions of class and his own ambition. He was extremely proud of the fact that he was "always the first" and "the only black member" of several prominent white organizations, including the Philadelphia Art Alliance. Eschewing race as a determinant, Howard justified his acceptance and rise in white art circles, as opposed to that of other known artists, as being based on objective standards. He said, "You were good or you were ordinary." Few black artists would agree with Howard that these were the universal standards applied to black artists.

Throughout most of the fifties, Humbert Howard and ,the Pyramid Club's annual art exhibition continued to grow in stature. Although the shows presented the work of a number of promising young artists, it continued to display the art of the best-known local and national African American and white artists. By consistently presenting his own art in the club's exhibitions, and through adept positioning with black and white artistic entrepreneurs, Howard became a highly recognized black artist whose work was displayed in most of the major museums and art galleries in Philadelphia, and in a few significant national exhibitions of African American artists. According to his testimony, he was included in "all" of the permanent collections of major Philadelphia institutions. His personal and professional relationships with such prominent black intellectuals and artists as Alain Locke, Romare Bearden, and James Porter and with such prominent whites as Albert Barnes, Robert Carlen, Julius Bloch, and Dorothy Grafly aided him in getting his art exhibited, marketed, sold, and placed in those permanent collections. These contacts and the resulting visibility he received assured his inclusion in the directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference works that singled out the most prominent African American artists and leaders.

Howard's philosophy of integration, and the level at which he appeared to ingratiate himself to whites, who could further his prominence and career, permeated—and, perhaps, for some, became glaring in—the annual art-program presentations of the late fifties. Given the escalating theme of self-determination that engulfed black America in that decade, his philosophy, and, perhaps, that of the old-guard club leadership, was more and more out of touch with that of the younger men who were becoming affiliated with the Pyramid Club. There is some indication that Howard and the younger men had a philosophical confrontation. In any case, there was no exhibition in 1958.

By then, it was evident that some felt the need for change. The first public indication of organizational dissent came in November of that year, when some younger members of the Pyramid Club held a press conference to discuss urgent issues. Bitter accusations were hurled at the organization, charging a loss of faith in the leadership. The specific problem appeared to be an unwillingness on the part of the old guard either to relinquish or to share the reins of leadership with the younger men. Moreover, they targeted the elitism, evident among the leadership and members, that refused to admit men who lacked an upper-middle or upper class status, and a resistance to changing the organization from a primarily social club to a policy-making organization. Some felt that the Pyramid Club lacked "a positive program" and that organizational activities had declined in 1958, leading to a loss in members and revenue. Allen Durant, a young pharmacist, felt that a reduction in the membership dues ($120) would provide greater access to "young men with high ideals" who could then afford to join.

In January 1959, there was a changing of the guard, as the Pyramid Club elected new officers and enacted new policies. Turner C. Johnson, president of APEX, a national black beauty company, was installed as president. A committee on cultural affairs, chaired by Samuel L. Evans, one of the so-called new guard, defined a slate of activities designed to attract new members. A monthly Boosters Night and a Caravan Nite, featuring special attractions, movies, and panel discussions of issues important to the black community, were designed to appeal to a broader audience. Although the art exhibitions continued, they focused exclusively on black artists. A clear indication of the break with Humbert Howard's philosophy is the fact that the 1959 exhibition was devoted solely to the paintings and prints of William H. Tasker, a black artist. As the organization sought new ways to fund its activities, it began to produce programs in cooperation with such commercial entities as the Schaefer Brewing Company. Recognizing the economic potential of the black community, cigarette and alcohol distributors actively sought black organizations with high profiles whose images could be used in the promotion of these products to the African American community.

The changing of the guard and the new policies alienated the old leadership, who evidenced their protest by simply refusing to pay membership dues. The new leadership responded in June 1959 by dropping thirty-four of the most prominent citizens. At the end of the year, Joseph Hudson, a service-station owner, well-known golfer, and former president of the all-black Fairview Golf Club, was elected president of the Pyramid Club. He was opposed by William Sampson, a member of the board. The election of Hudson precipitated a turmoil in the organization. For some, Hudson's election indicated a clear break with the past. The number of delinquent dues-paying members continued to rise; to meet the deficit, the membership fees were increased to $135. Hudson faced a controversy over the dining room's operation and a decline in its "swankiness." Moreover, the supportive activities of the Pyramid Wives declined, as the women of the old guard disappeared with their husbands.

By July 1959, it seemed that the Pyramid Club was at its end. Ralph Matthews, veteran black newspaperman, asserted, "Don't look now, but unless something is done and quick Philadelphia's most famous haven of the well-to-do. . . will be in limbo." Matthews' comments neatly summed up the problems:

For more than 30 years the organization has weathered many storms, but the present crisis seems to be the most serious with a lot of oldtimers disgruntled and threatening to wash their hands of the whole shebang. So acute is the rift among the top brass that only race pride and memories of its historic past can be called upon to seal the breach. Everybody is whispering and grumbling but nobody is talking out loud.

In 1961 and 1962, the dispute between the old and the new guard and the struggle for power and control of the organization continued. As the arguments were publicly aired, many prominent members were dropped from the membership rolls for failing to pay their dues. In July 1961, the organization ousted one hundred members. At that point, the president, John W. Robertson Jr. , and the chairman of the board, Samuel L. Evans, stated that the membership had abolished the requirement that new members pay $120 joining fees. They announced that membership was by invitation only and that there was no joining fee. The new policy appeared to attract a few new members, but the organizational decline and indebtedness continued to escalate to the point that, in April 1963, the Internal Revenue Service padlocked the club’s building for failure to pay Social Security and withholding taxes for employees in 1961 and 1963.

From 1940 to 1958, the images and successes of Humbert Howard and the Pyramid Club were intertwined. They both ascended to prominence at a time when some blacks were struggling to prove themselves the equals of whites and when class and color distinctions were drawn very tightly in white and black America. The rise of the civil rights struggle of the late forties and fifties, growing black nationalism and identification with the masses, and an increase in black pride signaled a significant departure from the past. These changes exacerbated generational differences, which became clearly evident in the Pyramid Club. Unlike the younger men, the old guard placed a higher value on color and status and contacts with whites as they sought validation from white America. By 1958, Howard and many of the Pyramid Club’s members found themselves in conflict with the new generation. Unwilling to change and confronted with controversy, many simply left the organization.

At some point in 1958 or 1959, as the Pyramid Club reverberated with charges and countercharges from dissidents old and young, and as it struggled to maintain its stability, Humbert Howard resigned his position as director of the exhibition committee. By 1962, he was associated in a similar capacity with the John A. Lee Memorial Adult Cultural Center. Although this organization did not appear to have the glitz and glamour of the Pyramid Club, it allowed Howard to maintain his status as an arts executive who, through his presence and contacts, exerted a beneficial influence on the promotion of black art and who enhanced his own career through positive recognition.

As the fortunes of the Pyramid Club declined, those of Humbert Howard ascended. His contacts and positional strategy worked; by 1950, he was acknowledged the “dean” of black artists in Philadelphia. That year, he was invited to participate in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts annual exhibition, and his painting *The Yellow Cup* was purchased for the museum’s permanent collection. This provided him the entree and validation among white collectors, dealers, and museums that he so coveted. After 1950, his career soared. He received invitations to exhibit at most of the major white museums and galleries in Philadelphia. Validation in the world of black artists came in October 1967 when he was selected as one of fifty-five renowned black artists and one of three Philadelphia artists to be featured in “The Evolution of Afro-American Artists,” a chronological exhibition organized by Romare Bearden and Carroll Greene Jr. Acclaimed as the most comprehensive presentation of its kind ever assembled, the exhibition opened at the Great Hall of City College in New York. Beginning with Joshua Johnston (active from 1796 to about 1824), the one hundred fifty works, comprising oils, watercolors, sculpture, drawings, and prints, were divided into four periods: “The Nineteenth Century,” “The Negro Renaissance” (1920s), “The Depression Years to World War II,” and “World War II to 1950.” Displaying the work of such artists as Henry O. Tanner, Edmonia Lewis, Meta Warrick Fuller, Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, and Hughie Lee-Srnith, among others, the exhibition was a Who's Who of historic black artists. Howard was among five artists chosen to represent the World War II to 1950 period; the others were Haywood Rivers, Richard Mayhew, Merton Simpson, and John Farrar. To be featured in an exhibition with artists of this stature was validation of one's work at the highest level.

At his death, in 1990, Humbert Howard had achieved more than most black artists and many white artists. He had fame and money, He was accepted by blacks and whites. As a pragmatic and astute observer of society, he exhibited, during his lifetime, a rare flexibility that enabled him to modify his views and behavior to accommodate significant changes in society that could affect his livelihood and well-being.