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THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ART MUSEUM:
FORMATION OF ITS PREVAILING ATTITUDES

by

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B.A., University of Florida, 1971

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of the Arts
of Virginia Commonwealth University

in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of ~~Fine~~ Arts

*Library copies
corrected 3/21/83
MS.*

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

December, 1982

INTRODUCTION

In less than one hundred years the American public art museum evolved from a well-intentioned concept into one of the twentieth century's most influential institutions. From 1870 to 1970 the institution adapted and eclipsed its European models with its didactic orientation and the drive of its founders. This striking development is due greatly to the ability of the museum to attract influential and decisive leaders who established its attitudes and governing policies. The mark of its success is its ability to influence the way art is perceived and remembered--the museum affects art history.

An institution is the people behind it: they determine its goals, develop its structure, chart its direction. The institution's ability to succeed is limited by its leaders' abilities. The institution mirrors their strengths and their weaknesses, assimilating the best and the worst of those persons with which it is most closely associated.

This is especially true for the public art museum where strong, decisive leadership by powerful individuals was seldom lacking. No other public institution has so consistently been alligned with people of enormous wealth and prominence and none has experienced the degree of success associated with the public art museum.¹ The sense of surety and importance which the art museums convey is the manifestation of its alliance with people who were either very rich, important, influential or all

¹Germaine Bazin, The Museum Age(New York: Universe Books, Inc., 1967), p. 249.

three. As founders and later as trustees of the public art museums these people diligently sought to imbue their institutions with the ability "to promote learning and provide a cultural base"² through its collection. Many had subscribed to the concept of a public art museum after having watched helplessly as several admirable collections of fine art were dispersed for lack of organization to assume responsibility for them after their owner's death. These people were protective of their own collection and worked for a public art museum in order to insure its preservation and secure its future. The museum's collection is its reason for being and its most evident sign of success.

Many of the museum trustees had collections of their own, varying in size and quality. Individually their effects on art and its history would have gone unnoticed except for the Morgans, Mellons and Rockefellers among them. But collectively, in the museum context, they had much to say and they used their authority shrewdly. This was especially evident in the art market where the public art museums of America displayed substantial resources. The art dealers, competing collectors and even the artists took note. It was there that the museums made their initial impact by purchasing widely, in decisive moves, establishing a pattern that would alter art values conclusively.

The trustees who led the museums had no rules to follow, no guide-books or higher authority to whom they needed to answer. They made their decisions based on their prior business experiences with the authority they had learned in the business world. There had been no art training for these leaders and they bought according to their whims from what was available.

²Joshua Taylor, "The Art Museum in the United States," in On Understanding Art Museums, ed. Sherman Lee (New York: Prentice Hall, 1975), p.34.

They bought as much as they could and continued to purchase and exhibit all that they had collected. The public art museums were forced to move to larger buildings to accommodate their growing collections and soon began replacing pieces of lesser quality with the finest artwork available. Historical events in Europe aided this endeavor and the museum trustees took the opportunity presented to make their museums the finest in the world.

The decisions made by the trustees were predicated on their own interest and that of the museum. Museum policy was established with this priority and the museum flourished under the leadership of contented trustees. They decided on exhibitions often featuring their own collections and purchased according to their own taste and discretion. They took advantage of their position of power at the museum to enhance their own collection through its association with "museum quality" pieces. Having thus established this attitude, it was relatively easy to attract others of like minds to the museum boards.

These were often friends and relatives of the trustees who saw their fellow collectors benefiting from association with a public art museum in a variety of ways. Most importantly the trustees enhanced their collections by exhibiting in an institution which promised continuity in the tradition of the European art palaces and improving quality. Although all public art museums subscribed to an educational objective, the collection and preservation of art was the museums' primary function.

The museums grew by attracting trustees with collections. As the size of the museum collection increased, so too did its scope, quality and its reputation and that attracted more gifts and willing trustees. The trustees sought others like themselves so they could be sure to preserve

their shared interests and be assured of similar, if not always equal, financial obligations. The period between 1900 and the late 1930's was one of greatly increased prosperity for the museum and the most important collection period for both individuals and museums. Because of favorable tax laws, many of the collectors bought works of art which they committed to the museum of their choice, but they were able to keep the work with the taxes deferred because of the work's proposed destination. Collectors were assisted in their important purchases by artist-advisers, knowledgeable dealers and sometimes by the increasing number of museum professionals with artistic training.

This important period of expansion also witnessed the development of the public's trust in the museum where the quality artwork would be found. Connoisseurship had recently been popularized due to the newsworthy attitude of the press every time one of the important collectors had a masterpiece validated. The large sums paid for artwork generated much public attention, but were thought to guarantee the worth of the many fine works entering the United States in record numbers. The wealthy also used their art purchases destined for the museums to help avert the strong public opinion against their immense fortunes. Americans would someday own the first rate artwork of these collectors and not have to be satisfied with the plaster casts and replicas which the museums had originally purchased for educational purposes. Due to the generosity of the American collectors, much of the world's finest artwork was brought to this country during the first half of the twentieth century.³

The extent to which the trustees of the art museum influenced its

³John Walker, Self-Portrait with Donors (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1969), p. 67.

dynamic rise to power cannot be overstated. First by their own energies and later through the directors and staff they chose, the trustees propelled the museum into a position at the apex of importance, especially within the art world. It is through the museums that works of artistic merit are shared with the public for enjoyment or study; newly found work is premiered; artwork created at similar times or with sympathetic themes, techniques, or artists can be compared; even whole artistic movements can be recognized. The museum shapes art history by presenting its exhibitions in terms that will be remembered as fact.⁴ Once viewed in the museum, the value of a piece of art both monetarily and in a historical context is not easily dismissed. The trustees used the museum's "legitimizing effect" in their own best interest enhancing their own collections. Then, usually, those same collections were donated to the very museums which had legitimized them as museum quality.

But the trustees had inherent limitations which they also shared with their museums. Their single-mindedness often blinded them to anything but their purpose, and museums gained the reputation by association of being aloof and self-righteous due to this attitude. After World War II the museums' attendance swelled and the trustees saw this as a sign of affirmation for their policies and their self-righteousness increased. The country-club atmosphere accelerated and self-centered policies continued until the social unrest of the 1960's jolted them into recognition of contemporary issues. Many trustees were so badly shaken by the scathing personal attacks on their life styles and priorities that they resigned and the whole financial backing of the museum was altered. The public had

⁴Kay Larson, "The Myth and Logic of Making Taste in NY," Art News, Nov. 1976: 36.

finally claimed its museums and began demanding the dialogue it felt entitled to from a public institution. The public still has little input into the museums' policies and presentations and makes itself heard by attending or avoiding the museum in very large proportions. The museum board recognizes that there is a world beyond its walls although it chooses not to address itself to external issues very often. That remains their choice.

This investigation of the public art museum in America, especially during its formative years as a nascent institution, will concentrate on three distinct groups of people responsible for the directions the museum followed and the formation of its prevailing attitudes. Of those, the collectors and trustees form the most pervasive and influential group; its effect on the museum composition is of paramount importance. Logistically, the trustees founded the museums, provided their initial manpower and organization, supplied the collections and supplementary funding, hired the professional staff and gave it direction. The diverse characteristics of this group have been of major importance to the individualized atmosphere of the museums within this collective institution.

A second group, of supporting function, comprises another important faction in the museum's evolution. The art dealers, artistic advisers and connoisseurs have most directly influenced the collectors and thereby had an indirect influence on the museum's development. Few artists and very few critics could also be included within this group, however tangentially, as collectors often seem to feel personally responsible for the work of art.

The professional museum staff evolved from an untrained group of collection attendants, originally hired to "look after the collection" into well-trained specialists within a chosen field of expertise. Through their professionalism and devotion, standards of exhibition and museum presentation

pioneered in America have been adopted worldwide because of their high quality and didactic approach. The museum professionals are powerful arbiters of taste and value within the art world, where their personal attention to an artist or artistic movement can have immense effect in determining success or failure.⁵

The history of the art museum's growth in America is presented in this thesis to place the development of the public art museum in the proper context. Private museums exist to feature a private collection, most often without other presentations as are found in the university museums and public institutions. Large public art museums are "encyclopedic" in nature, presenting an overview of the history of art and special art extravaganzas to attract the public. The smaller institutions struggle to make a place for themselves, many questioning the most prudent direction of a collection limited by resources, space and interest. Funding is now the major consideration shared by museums of all sizes and types.

The museum has absorbed its sense of worth and power from the people who also shaped its policy and believed in its ability to accomplish positive feats. Its growth as a force in the art world was subtle and studied, but amazingly complete. The museum which doubts its ability to persuade, convince, educate and entertain does not long survive. Examining the people and their attitudes with whom the museums had the most contact and noting its response to the world in which it has operated, the parallels are strikingly similar. The museum is strong because those three groups each contributed to its growth and maturity; its weaknesses are those in which the three factions were also less effective. There are no hard and fast truths to prove this theory--but examination of its plausibility is a valuable tool for understanding how the museum became such an important institution of our time.

⁵Harold Rosenberg, "The Museum Today," The De-Definition of Art (New York: Collier Books, 1973), pp. 235-36.

CHAPTER I

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ART MUSEUM: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is generally acknowledged that the first American art museum was opened in 1782, when the portraitist Charles Willson Peale exhibited forty of his own paintings under a sign reading, The Peale Museum of Philadelphia.⁶ Originally conceived by Peale as an attempt to attract further painting commissions, this private museum failed to generate attention until the artist decided to display the scientific relics borrowed from a friend alongside his paintings. The addition of these scientific relics and accompanying documentation proved popular with the public and, as a result, the museum's success was assured. The success of the Peale Museum illustrates the prevailing attitude toward the fine arts at that time. The presence of works of art was thought to be culturally enriching although lacking the weight of knowledge imparted through the scientific and historical exhibitions.⁷

The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, founded in Philadelphia in 1805, was the first public institution to devote itself strictly to the arts.⁸ Its establishment was to serve a two-fold purpose: to

⁶Kenneth Hudson, The Social History of the Museum (New York: Humanities Press, 1975), p. 33.

⁷Taylor, pp. 36-37.

⁸Herbert and Marjorie Katz, Museums USA (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 33.

function as a learning center where art, reflective of the American spirit, could be produced and to provide exhibitions of art to elevate the public taste.⁹ The Pennsylvania Academy was unique among its contemporaries as it alone prospered in its exclusive devotion to the arts. The lack of success for similar institutions, such as the American Academy of Fine Arts, founded in New York in 1802, and the American Museum of New York, founded in 1810, was due in large measure to the lack of enthusiasm or interest for exhibitions dedicated exclusively to the arts.¹⁰ Both the Boston Athenaeum, founded in 1807, and the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut, founded in 1844, collected and exhibited paintings and sculpture, but continued, in the pattern established by the earliest American museums, to exhibit objects of scientific and historic interest along with the works of art. This was also the case when, in 1847, James Renwick designed the first Smithsonian building in Washington, D.C., to include an art gallery which was never solely used for that purpose.¹¹

Yale, Harvard and Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, were the first universities to realize the benefits of an on-campus fine arts collection both as an educational resource and as a prestigious cultural attraction.¹² In 1811, the Hon. James Bowdoin, III, bequeathed his collection of paintings and drawings to Bowdoin College, where an art museum was built in 1857. Yale was the first American college to build its own

⁹Taylor, 35.

¹⁰Laurence Vail Coleman, The Museum in America (Washington, D.C.: AAM, 1939), p. 9.

¹¹Taylor, p. 36.

¹²Bazin, p. 245.

gallery when Col. John Trumbull presented his collection of paintings to the University in 1832. The James Jackson Jarves collection of Italian Renaissance paintings went to Yale in the 1860's because both the New York and the Boston Historical Societies declined it rather than devote such a large portion of their display area to artwork. Harvard University's collections, dating back to 1750, were destroyed in a fire in the 1860's, but its Fogg Museum, built in 1891, houses a world-renowned collection of drawings.¹³

In time, other universities, such as Duke and Vassar College followed the pattern set by these schools and established university museums which would help to promote the scholarly investigation of the arts. These would be the same schools which would train the museum professionals that began to emerge later in the century.

The important role the art collector would come to play in the development of the autonomous art museum in America was just beginning with Trumbull, Bowdoin and Jarves. The collector's importance would increase greatly and his association with museums would prove to be mutually supportive and enhancing, but such was not the case in the pre-Civil War years. This period, coming before the ultimate popularization of the museum, would prove to be very frustrating to the aspiring collector, for whom the availability of artworks other than American was generally limited.¹⁴ These limitations included the American collectors' own biases against purchasing art executed by unestablished American artists in favor of artwork with credentials from Europe.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴W. G. Constable, Art Collecting in the United States (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1964), p. 5.

Most of the 17th century European artwork brought to the United States, however, was thought to be either decadent or offensive to the American cultured class.¹⁵ The established, refined works of the Old Masters were preferred by American collectors, who looked naturally to the European dealers as a source and for advice on these purchases. The European dealers sensed the abundance of both the American wealth and gullability and many of them took full advantage of the situation by proferring forgeries, false certificates of authentication and liberally altered attributions.¹⁶ The honest dealers were hard to distinguish from the dishonest and, fortunately, it did not take the Americans long to discover that they would do better to collect the work of either the French Academy or American art, where the authentication was easier to establish.

Noteworthy among the late 19th century American collectors was Luman Reed, a New York grocer who began his collection of art with paintings attributed to the Old Masters, many of which were later proven to be unauthentic.¹⁷ It was his collection of late 18th and 19th century American art, including the works of Asher B. Durand and S.F.B. Morse, for which Reed was noted by the American Academy in 1818 for "the art and industry he had displayed in selecting specimens of the different (American) schools with the laudable view of improving the public taste."¹⁸

¹⁵Taylor, p. 35.

¹⁶Constable, p. 6.

¹⁷Calvin Tomkins, Merchants and Masterpieces (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), p. 26.

¹⁸Constable, pp. 26-27.

Reed opened his collection for public view one day a week in the gallery located above his home hoping to nurture an interest in the arts among his many business friends. After his death, Luman Reed's collection formed the nucleus of the influential, but short-lived New York Gallery of Fine Arts established by his family and friends. Founded in 1844, the gallery closed in 1854 due to a lack of funding (collection dispersed).¹⁹

The mid-century and post-Civil War years ushered in social and economic changes which would set the stage for the founding of America's major art museums. The number of collectors and the quality of collections increased with the great fortunes acquired during the Reconstruction and with the advent of competent and reputable dealers, among them the companies of Vose and Knoedler.²⁰ With their fine collections, art collectors such as Luman Reed, James Lenox and Thomas Jefferson Bryant set examples which encouraged and assured other men of wealth that the collecting of art was a worthwhile endeavor reflecting both good taste and great fortunes. In less than a decade, American collectors would become the founders, patrons, and trustees of art museums in many major cities throughout the country.

The social value of the arts in the mid-19th century was greatly enhanced as art acquired "a moral and aesthetic existence"²¹ thought to be beneficial to the development of moral character for the maturing nation. Encouraged by the European philosophies of the Enlightenment,

¹⁹Tomkins, p. 27.

²⁰Constable, p. 42.

²¹Taylor, p. 37.

American educators DeWitt Clinton and Charles Eliot Norton reaffirmed for men of education and wealth the importance of using the arts "to influence and shape the tastes of the masses."²² A social consciousness was awakened in American cities, where Reconstruction and greatly increasing immigration presented extremely poor living conditions for the lower classes, and prompted the establishment of schools, libraries, settlement houses and the expansion of newspapers by prominent men and women to educate and uplift the public. In this same sweep of social consciousness, the public art museum was conceived and, in the opinion of Germain Bazin, equated with the founding of the other educational institutions as a "constructive charity."²³

The imminent foundation of America's public art museums was influenced by other forces as well. The social power and prestige of the World's Fair Exhibitions in London in 1851, and in New York in 1853, appealed greatly to the businessmen and collectors residing in those and other cities, as well.²⁴ These elaborate expositions conveyed a favorable cultural atmosphere and enhanced the appeal of the host city. The communities also came to realize their own responsibilities in bringing about like expositions and cultural institutions, rather than depending on the private collectors to bring the desired institutions into being. The success in New York of the Metropolitan Art Fair in 1864 reaffirmed the public's interest in the arts and prompted the most influential and affluent businessmen and collectors of that city to form a committee, in

²²Lillian B. Miller, Patrons and Patriotism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 15.

²³Bazin, p. 249.

²⁴Hudson, p. 41.

1866, to investigate the possibility of establishing an art museum. Four years later, in 1870, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was established and, that same year, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Corcoran in Washington, D.C., were founded. Philadelphia (1876) and Chicago (1879) followed with museums of their own.

Among the trustees and founders of the public art museums those who collected art led the way. Martin Ryerson, a Chicago lawyer and collector, helped found the Chicago Art Institute as did John T. Johnson and Joseph Choate, the Metropolitan Museum in New York. As collectors, these men had amassed collections which served as testimony to their discriminating eye and taste and, of equal importance, their ability to afford to purchase. Trustees sought out like-minded men "of fortune and estate"²⁵ to support and administer the art museums as a method of perpetuating their own aura of wealth, power and prestige. These same men also gave generously to the other burgeoning social and charitable institutions, but none repaid them so handsomely as the art museum by providing a place which so aptly reflected their altruism, taste and wealth.

The public museums developed under a variety of influences which would determine their individual characters. These influences included diverse methods of funding, public support and community attitudes. In Boston, where the community had very consistently demonstrated its support for the arts since 1807, the Museum of Fine Arts was endowed from its inception by the Massachusetts legislature. Upon completion of its new building in 1876, the museum was filled with the collections of the Boston Athenaeum.²⁶ The history of the Metropolitan Museum in New York

²⁵Tomkins, p. 21.

²⁶Miller, p. 120.

is much different than that of Boston and more closely approximates the problems faced by other public museums.

The Metropolitan remained a museum on paper with a charter and a disappointing public subscription drive well into its second year.²⁷ Although the trustees were generous, several of the wealthiest art patrons, including John Jacob Astor and August Belmont, refused to support the new museum until its viability was more evident. The trustees themselves withheld gifts from their own collections until they could be sure that the museum would indeed succeed.

Its chance to do so came in 1871, with the chaos in Europe created by the Franco-Prussian War. Just as American museums and collectors would come to benefit a number of times due to European political instability, the 1870's witnessed a forced evacuation of Paris and panic selling of art, including the Old Masters, at a fraction of their ordinary value. William T. Blodgett, a Metropolitan trustee, bought for the museum three private European collections which would form the beginning of its collection and its first exhibition. When the paintings arrived in the states, the trustees, highly satisfied with their blind purchase, secured a temporary exhibition hall to display the 174 paintings along with the gifts and loans these had inspired. On February 17, 1872, the Metropolitan Museum had its first show.

A permanent home for the Metropolitan Museum required negotiations with the City of New York, which continued until 1873 when the museum, owing to its continued financial problems, entered into a partnership with the City of New York. The City agreed to raise \$500,000 in taxes

²⁷Tomkins, p. 35.

towards the construction of a museum in Central Park, which the City would own and maintain. The trustees of the museum would own the contents of the building and administer the museum independently of the City.²⁸ This arrangement would establish a precedent for other cities in the formation of the municipal museum.

The public for whom the art museums were established belonged to the leisure class. Although the guiding rationale for the museum was to uplift the standards of culture for the viewers, the trustees felt that only those with any breeding or education could possibly benefit from the artwork on display. To this end, most museums were originally located in the better neighborhoods and kept regular weekday business hours, which prohibited the working class from visiting the galleries.²⁹ This inherent incongruity became more pronounced with the advent of the public museum, where the working class' taxes were used to support museums they could never experience. The working class requested Sunday viewing hours and in 1881, in New York, they petitioned the Metropolitan for the same privilege which Bostonians had been given in 1876. Conservative Metropolitan trustees fought for ten years against this measure, but lost when, on Sunday, May 31, 1891, the galleries were open for the afternoon. The museum became a truly public institution with the advent of Sunday viewing.

Art associations, usually formed by artists and amateurs, provided another important source for the foundation of museums. The art associations often began with art classes and lectures and the exhibition of artwork borrowed from collectors or the work of local artists.³⁰ These

²⁸Ibid., p. 41.

²⁹Katz, p. 9.

³⁰Taylor, p. 40.

groups, although most often private, lacked the elitist attitude often found with the collectors, in their relationships with museums, and they stressed participation and understanding of the arts over acquisition. Art associations established in Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Detroit resulted in museums for those cities in 1881, 1883 and 1885, respectively, which were later made public.

The educational commitment inherent in the foundation of each art museum was as individualized as its collection, each differing in methods, standards and goals.³¹ The art associations, such as those in Portland, Oregon, and Detroit, Michigan, founded art schools in conjunction with their museums for amateurs and aspiring artists. The museums founded by businessmen, the Metropolitan, for example, encouraged "popular instruction" especially as it related to the improvement of the quality of manufacturing and industry.³² The charter of the Boston Museum and that of the Metropolitan differ only slightly, but their educational presentations demonstrate the polarities in this facet of the museum network.

The School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston has, since its inception in 1870, developed into one of the best in the country, providing instruction of popular appeal and academic relevance to all phases of the visual arts. The Metropolitan, even at its most educationally-oriented (at the turn of the century under Henry Kent)³³ peaked by providing its public with regular Saturday and Sunday lectures, one

³¹Hamilton, George H., "Education, Scholarship & the American Museum," in On Understanding Art Museums, ed. by Sherman Lee. (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975) p. 107.

³²Tomkins, p. 23.

³³Ibid., p. 118.

scholarly, the other, popular; free admission days to school teachers; and a classroom where visiting school children could be greeted and instilled with "a properly reverential attitude."³⁴ Most museums have found a position they find suitable within the wide range of educational possibilities. The Virginia Museum in Richmond, Virginia, for example, offers a rotating schedule or specialized instruction by guest faculty as well as members' lectures and programs for school children.

Both public and private museums continued to be administered by their original founders and trustees well into the 1870's. The trustees raised the funds for operating the museum and, when possible, for purchasing; supervised exhibitions; accepted collections and bought for the museum and for themselves. As the museum and its collection grew, so too did the demands on the trustees, who reluctantly sought a director.³⁵ It was most important to the trustees that the director should possess the correct social credentials, have good taste, and be able to carry out their wishes.³⁶ Artistic training was not a requirement for the position, as in the case of General Liugi Palma di Cesnola, an archaeologist with an impressive military career, hired from within its own board by the Metropolitan as the first director in 1879.³⁷

The Metropolitan's first curator was hired in 1882 to "look after all works of art in the museum."³⁸ By 1889, when the total staff of the

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Daniel Catton Rich, "Management, Power, Integrity," On Understanding Art Museums, ed. Sherman Lee. (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975) p. 133.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Bazin, p. 248

³⁸Tomkins, p. 79.

Metropolitan had grown to fifty-four, there were three curators who Cesnola worked seven days a week and on holidays.³⁹ The curators were generally treated as subordinates by both the director and the trustees until they had demonstrated their value to the trustees on a private scale. This practice continued until after the turn of the century.

The final decade of the nineteenth century witnessed a conservative increase in the museum's popular support (i.e., membership) while its growth in physical size and collections, and its attraction for the wealthy and powerful, was formidable. The construction of new buildings for those museums founded in the 1870's allowed them to abandon their temporary galleries and signalled their success. The new buildings were imposing structures in classical style reminiscent of the 17th century French palaces which reflected the proper "social status"⁴⁰ for the arts and would be adopted by museums in every major city through the 1920's.

Collecting for the private collector, and on behalf of the museum, reached its summit in America in the three decades beginning in the 1890's. A new level of scholarship had resulted from the specialized studies of influential connoisseurs such as Bernard Berenson, Wilhelm von Bode, Roger Fry, and Max J. Friedlander, which encouraged the collector to purchase with new found authority. Art dealers, collectors and museum professionals sought the advice of these experts and the art market flourished. Long forgotten eras and little-known masters were revived by detailed studies such as Berenson's Italian Painters of the Renaissance,⁴¹

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Taylor, p. 47.

⁴¹Bernhard Berenson, Italian Painters of the Renaissance,
(New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907)

which became, and continues to be, a handbook of inestimable value for collectors.⁴² The activities of the art market were accelerated by the broadening areas of scholarship and the American buying wave extended to include the purchase of tapestries, porcelain, armor and the decorative arts as well as painting and sculpture. Prices were greatly increased during this period as only the most expensive works received attention and esteem among the American collectors dominating the art market.

Private and public collections alike flourished during this period although the latter had a distinct advantage. Until 1909, the import taxes on works of art destined for the public art museum were much less than those on works entering this country as part of a private collection. To circumvent the enormous taxes -- the import taxes on a \$50,000 painting brought its price to \$150,000⁴³ -- the museums and their benefactors arranged to designate a work of art for the museum, eventually, while allowing the donor to retain possession as long as he desired.⁴⁴ The donor often loaned the museum the work until he was ready to carry through with the actual relinquishing of the gift. This arrangement was often used when purchase funds were limited and a trustee came to the museum's aid by purchasing a desired work. After 1909, art works over one hundred years old were not taxed and further relaxation of import duties on all works of art followed in the 1920's.

Despite the high taxes, the private collectors continued to

⁴²Frederick Hartt, "Bernard Berenson 1865-1959," Art Quarterly Spring, 1961: 89-91.

⁴³Constable, p. 6.

⁴⁴Bazin, p. 258.

purchase and their collections expanded. A collection of art was a visible justification for the enormous wealth amassed at the turn of the century by a few industrialists and businessmen.⁴⁵ The possibility of a loan to the museums or bequest from one or more of these fabulous collections gave power and status to the collectors such as Mrs. Potter Palmer, Samuel Kress and John Quinn. Museums courted the collectors, enticing them with prestigious trusteeships and assistance in maintaining and improving their collections. After a collector became a trustee, the possibility for the eventual acquisition of his collection increased, but the courting continued until the prize was won. The collectors played what Calvin Tomkins calls a "cat and mouse game" with one or several museums at a time, using their collections as bait and exacting favors and influence.⁴⁶ The trustees encouraged like-minded friends to aid the museum either financially or by loaning their collections. In this manner, the museum prospered and grew as did its commitments of money and collections.

The collectors, especially those who were also trustees, soon realized their own importance at the hub of the art world. Museums, dealers, and artists looked to the collector to keep the money and interest alive in the art market. The power and influence of J. P. Morgan, Andrew Mellon and Stephen Clark would determine the direction of the museums on whose boards they served, where they generously endowed their fortunes and most often left their collections. Former director of the National Gallery, John Walker, credits the private collector and his vast amount

⁴⁵Tomkins, p. 95.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 157.

of wealth for having elevated the American art museum to its present exalted position.⁴⁷ There existed no other source of funding, at the time, which could have approached the generosity of the private collector.

The affiliation with a public museum did not suit every collector, each of whom had specific ideas about the future of his or her collection. Although most sizeable bequests to the museum included stipulations and specifics for maintaining the collections, the museum trustees often reinterpreted the benefactor's wishes to suit the museum's current needs. The private museum was the alternative sought by some of the very wealthy to assure their complete satisfaction. Isabella Stewart Gardner (Boston) and Albert Barnes (Philadelphia) both installed their collections in museums built solely for that purpose and established exact instructions and endowments to insure their fulfillment in perpetuity. The Frick Collection (New York), the Phillips Collection (Washington, D.C.), and the Freer Gallery (Washington, D.C.) were all founded from a private collection and endowment. The Freer Collection was accepted to become part of the Smithsonian Institution in 1922. Private collections offer the public a more intimate view of the taste and accomplishments of the collector than can be experienced in a wing or section of a public museum. Problems are now arising due to the spiraling inflation which prevents a generous endowment of fifty years ago from providing adequate maintenance of the private collections, such as with the Phillips Collection.⁴⁸

As the museum collections grew through gifts and purchases, the nature of the expanding museum was altered. Works with dubious attributions

⁴⁷Walker, p. 67.

⁴⁸Jo Ann Lewis, "The Passionate Eye of Duncan Phillips," The Washington Post Magazine, April 29, 1979: 50-54.

and plaster reproductions, with which Americans once thought they would have to be satisfied, were placed in storage as the works of "museum quality" filled the halls.⁴⁹ Museums became departmentalized as they grew and sought in curators, men and women who had special knowledge in their field. William Mills Ivins, for example, the Curator of Prints at the Metropolitan (1916-1933) whose knowledge and expertise was gained in creating his own print collection, helped make the Metropolitan's one of the finest in the world.⁵⁰ Period rooms, first used in America by the Metropolitan Museum in 1924, became a popular method of conveying the mood and setting in which the fine and decorative arts had originally been viewed. The large museums were becoming truly 'encyclopedic' in their scope, through their attempt to cover the whole history of the arts.

But history was being made in the arts in the first quarter of the twentieth century to which few museums took any notice. The Armory Show of 1913 had awakened America to 'modern' art with front page news items covering the crowds and attention the exhibition created as it traveled across the country. Until this time, only a few New York galleries such as Alfred Steiglitz's 291 Gallery, had been showing the work of such artists as Matisse, Picasso, Cezanne and the Americans, John Marin and Max Weber,⁵¹ but the more daring collectors had been buying the moderns for their private collections. Louise Havemeyer, Lillie P. Bliss and John Quinn persuaded the Metropolitan Museum to exhibit the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists in 1921. The show, culled from

⁴⁹Taylor, p. 48.

⁵⁰Bazin, p. 252.

⁵¹Russell Lynes, Good Old Modern (New York: Antheneum, 1973), p. 37.

private collections in New York, produced a scandal on the Metropolitan's board and critical denunciations from the press, even though it contained only the tamest examples of the period.⁵²

The sentiment for modern art and its rightful place in the history of art was growing nonetheless. The death of John Quinn in 1924, and the subsequent dispersal by auction of the fabulous collection of modern art he had collected, caused fellow New York collectors to lament the City's lack of concern for modern art. Quinn's collection would have provided any museum with a superb foundation in the moderns, but the necessary funds could not be found to keep the collection together and it was sold in Paris. This event, however, would propel Lillie Bliss, Mrs. Cornelius Sullivan and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller to initiate the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929. With the help of A. Conger Goodyear, a champion of modern art, Paul Sachs, whose course on museology at Harvard was then producing the first wave of trained museum professionals, and Alfred Barr, Jr., one of Sach's students and a gifted teacher in his own right, the museum rapidly progressed toward its opening in New York in November, 1929. The museum's overwhelming success surprised everyone as the public filled the galleries and so monopolized the building's elevators that the museum was threatened with eviction.

The objectives and direction the Museum of Modern Art would take were always much debated by the highly individualized trustees and staff. Only one man had a clear and cohesive conception of what the museum could represent, Alfred Barr, the director, methodically guided the museum in the direction he saw art of the twentieth century taking, which would

⁵²Tomkins, p. 304.

include photography, movies, theater, architecture and industry.⁵³ This ambitious concept, although developed by Barr for the first university course on modern art, taught by him at Wellesley College in 1926, would have shocked the trustees and so he kept it to himself. Under Barr's directorship, the museum very gradually developed exhibitions and then special departments to reflect the many facets of the modern spirit in fulfilling Barr's objective.

Barr pioneered museographical advances in presentation techniques and scholarly catalogues and the museum's traveling exhibitions and educational programs set standards of excellence which other museums admired and later adapted.⁵⁴ MOMA's rapid growth was not without its problems. The press, led by the art critic for the Herald Tribune, Royal Cortissoz, found much fault with the museum, condemning the trustees of self-serving motivations, and with the modern art, which he never came to appreciate. Even with the bad publicity shown there, the people came to see and judge for themselves. The museum soon grasped the power of publicity of any nature and as a result became the first museum to develop its own publicity department to generate and promote a positive interpretation of its activities.

The addition of a publicity department and the rapidly growing interest in the museum's exhibition rental programs and sales shop capabilities, made the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art realize that the museum was becoming a business. These added complexities and a move into its new, greatly expanded quarters on Fifth Avenue were making the museum

⁵³MacDonald, Dwight, "Action on West Fifty-third St. - I," The New Yorker, Dec. 12, 1953, p. 49-82. (Bound 29, part 4)

⁵⁴Lynes, p. 355.

too unwieldy and complex for the scholar, Barr, to manage and in 1941 he was demoted to Curator of Collections,⁵⁵ ending a turbulent but successful infancy for the museum.

One man who thoroughly understood the business aspects of an art museum was Andrew Mellon, a former Secretary of the Treasury and the founder of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., in 1937. A national art gallery had long been the dream of American art patrons and Mellon's generous endowment and fine collection created a solid base on which to build a national collection.⁵⁶ It was Mellon's contention that a beautiful museum would be a strong attraction to other collectors as he allowed for the finest in design and quality of materials in his bequest for the buildings's construction.⁵⁷ Mellon also took the necessary precautions to hire and donate the funds to pay the salaries for men with the necessary "charm, sophistication, (and) savoir faire" which would also entice potential collectors.⁵⁸ Mellon's dreams were realized as the National Collection became the home for three of the most prominent collections of the twentieth century along with his own -- those of Samuel Kress, Joseph Widener and Chester Dale.

The post-war years created a cultural boom encouraged by the growing use of the automobile and television and a reduced work week.⁵⁹

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 241

⁵⁶Walker, pp. 108-123.

⁵⁷Bazin, p. 259.

⁵⁸Walker, p. 35.

⁵⁹Alvin Schwartz, Museum (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1967), p. 18.

Museum professionals traveled to Paris for the first meeting of the International Council of Museums in 1947. This professional organization would help to foster greater communication between museums and lead the way toward advances in conservation, presentation techniques, and operational concepts. As museum attendance increased, so too did the effort of the museum staff to encourage its continuance.⁶⁰ Museum shops and snack bars were becoming a museum necessity, adding a greater dimension to a museum visit, but at the expense of gallery exhibition space.

In 1947 an agreement was reached by three New York City museums -- the Metropolitan, the Whitney, and the Museum of Modern Art -- to coordinate their efforts in order to distinguish their artistic territory. The Whitney Museum of American Art was founded in 1931 by the sculptor, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, to further the cause of American artists.⁶¹ At its inception, this aim did not severely intrude upon the Metropolitan's interest in the total history of art or that of the MOMA, founded two years before, whose ambition to reflect the modern arts was then directed mostly to Europe. By 1947, however, the three museums found their areas of interest overlapping and as a result they attempted to redefine their respective areas of specialization in a statement of interest. They also agreed to a financial arrangement whereby the MOMA was allowed to sell some of its older modern works to the Metropolitan in return for the ability to purchase, with the aid of the Metropolitan's Hearn Fund, new modern works.⁶² The agreement lasted for five years,

⁶⁰Barbara Y. Newsome and Adele Silver, The Museum as Educator (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 32.

⁶¹Lynes, p. 40.

⁶²Ibid., p. 290.

after which it was disbanded, owing to the dissatisfaction on the part of many influential donors as to the eventual destination of their collections.

The American public found the art museums in the 1950's and 1960's to be an easily accessible source of entertainment and information. The museums were seen as the "original drop-in learning centers," offering an educational opportunity for everyone.⁶³ The cost for maintaining the museums was rapidly increasing and admission costs were increased to attempt to cover the expenses. Along with higher admission prices, the museums felt obligated to provide more and better programs and facilities. These included audio accompaniment to interpret the artwork, a diverse assortment of installation techniques and finally, the 'blockbuster' exhibitions. The publicity and public relations departments worked hard to keep the numbers escalating in a quest of larger revenues. As attendance grew, additions to museum buildings were needed to house the expanding crowds, programs, services and exhibitions. In 1967, a new museum was opened in America every 3.5 days.⁶⁴

The American involvement in the war in southeast Asia and the burgeoning minority consciousness fostered an examination of the major institutions of the country in the late 1960's. The art museum was not immune and, in its unwillingness to relate to the problems of society, it became a prime target of the socially conscious. Museum exhibition policies and the political affiliations of the museum trustees became focal points

⁶³Newsome, p. 32.

⁶⁴Schwartz, p. 18.

for many artists, who boycotted, picketed and presented museums with demands for revamping existing museum policies. Due to their high visibility, the New York museums and especially the Museum of Modern Art, were major targets of numerous pressure groups. Black and women's rights groups sought to improve their representation in the museums on a sociological rather than artistic basis and museums, such as the Whitney, sympathetic to their pleas, attempted to rectify the situation. However, the artists and minorities were never totally appeased by the concessions made by the museums. Many of the trustees became uncomfortable with the unfavorable press coverage, which often focused on political affiliations and financial information of individual trustees. The museum, which had long served as a haven for the super rich -- where they could divest themselves of money, but not of wealth among friends -- was, for the first time, being called upon to answer for its validity in the social order.

Brian O'Doherty's Museums in Crisis discusses how the self-evaluation of the sixties, a time in which the museums floundered, ungraciously led directly to a greater hazard for the museum in the seventies -- that of the increasingly elusive financial support.⁶⁵ The museum's private backing by the trustees could not live up to its past level of fulfillment as museum costs spiraled. Corporate and government subsidies gradually began to assume a greater responsibility for underwriting the museum's presentations. The private collector has remained the prime source for gifts and bequests to the museums, but the scramble to find funds for operating expenses has caused the museums to think of themselves as a business whose main concern is now solvency. This

⁶⁵Brian O'Doherty, Museums in Crisis (New York: George Braziller, 1972), pp. 2-4.

problem followed the museums into the eighties, when more energies in and about the museums of today are devoted to financial concerns than are given to the museum's effectiveness.⁶⁶

The government's role in the arts grew at a rapid pace in the sixties and seventies, with the advent of the National Endowment of the Arts and Humanities and growing public interest in the arts. Two major art museums were added to the Smithsonian's increasing sphere of influence and point up the importance of the nation's capital on the art scene. Joseph Hirschorn donated his enormous collection of modern art and a bequest to the government and the Hirshorn Museum became part of the Smithsonian Institution, representing art of the twentieth century. The museum opened in October of 1974 to much criticism of its 'doughnut' shape, a building where only 500 sculptures and 400 paintings of the 3100 sculptures and 7000 paintings donated by Hirshorn can be viewed. There was also much concern and controversy of Hirshorn, himself, and how he earned his immense fortune.⁶⁷

The East Building of the National Gallery, which opened in September of 1978, was an entirely different story. Praised for its vivacity and functionalism, I. M. Pei's striking architecture is a soaring tribute to the arts and yet, the galleries are small and personally scaled to reflect the intimacy of one of D.C.'s favorite museums -- the Phillips Collection.⁶⁸ The East Building is most often used for special

⁶⁶William S. Herndon, Analyzing the Art Museum (New York: Praeger, 1979), p. 33.

⁶⁷Karl E. Meyer, The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1979), p. 15.

⁶⁸Lewis, p. 54.

exhibitions either from its own National Collection or for touring exhibitions. The Hirshorn and the East Building have filled out the Smithsonian and established the United States government as a major arbiter of the arts.

Corporate support for the arts has provided the decisive edge for many museums in the last decade. The oil companies and big businesses look to the museums, as did J. P. Morgan and other wealthy industrialists at the turn of the century, for a visible means of justifying their large profits. Criticism of smoking and the tobacco industry or the high cost of fuel are thought to be greatly dispelled when Philip Morris, Inc., or the Exxon Corporation sponsors a cultural event. The 'blockbuster exhibition' resulted from the combined need for high visibility and publicity on the part of the sponsor and the museum's desire to attract new visitors into its galleries. The great popular support for exhibitions such as the Tutankhamen showing, was also economically beneficial to those cities where increased tourism resulted from the exhibition.

Collectors such as Norton Simon, Robert and Ethel Scull and Armand Hammer are among the wealthiest and most influential in today's art scene. Norton Simon single-handedly rescued the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from closing its doors by establishing an agreement which entitled Simon to name the museum the Norton Simon Museum of Art, hiring a new director and installing his own collection in a whirlwind of creative financing. The surely honed business acumen of these collectors and others like them reinforce their influence on the art market. The auction has emerged as the prime battleground where collectors, museums and dealers joust to determine the current price, and therefore, value of a work of art which ultimately affects others of the same school and often, the whole body of an artist's work. Each sale, especially to and from the

public sector, affects all future sales and the museum, because of its responsibility to collect wisely, is especially vulnerable.⁶⁹

The museum is an institution which has developed reflecting the power and surety of those who have shaped it. Each museum, in fulfilling its educational objective and collecting and preserving to the best of its capabilities, has also assimilated the authority of its most influential and effective proponents.

⁶⁹J. Michael Montias, "Are Museums Betraying the Public's Trust?" Museum News, May, 1973: 25.

CHAPTER II

PUBLIC ART MUSEUMS: GAINING A SENSE OF WHAT THEY COULD BECOME

American institutions reflect very closely the attitudes of those people who have formed them. For the public art museum in America, the most decisive period in its development, that in which its goals and directions were shaped and put into action, was the half-century between the 1870's and 1930's. A great majority of the people most influential in the museum's development were affiliated with one or more museums during that period and helped it to establish itself as an institution with a strong and confident identity, not unlike their own. Although commitments and their reasons for contributing varied, the people alligned with the museum all knew how to succeed and they passed that valuable information onto the institution, subtly, but decisively, until it gained its own influence and sense of importance. Today the intrinsic importance of the museum is rarely questioned, even when the artwork shown there may be.

The esteem of the museum and its ability to affect the art world has a noticeable influence on the artwork which is chosen for exhibition there. As the museum came into its own, it also acquired the ability to validate or legitimize a work of art by merely showing it or by neglecting it.⁷⁰ This legitimizing process can have a tremendous

⁷⁰Larson, p. 37.

effect on the value of a piece of artwork, itself, and on its creator and owner. Based on little more than faith and tradition, the museum's ability to foster such an effect is a direct result of its historical role as the protector of artistic treasures of value and the attitude of surety assimilated from its founders. Museums came into being and flourished because artwork worth saving found safe refuge there, where it could be viewed and enjoyed by those who could appreciate its benefits.

The belief in the museum's practical application towards this end engendered the collective energies of three distinct groups which can be seen as being of great importance in the pattern the public American museum followed. The course it took during its developmental period has had much to do with how the museum operates in today's complex artistic situations, also, and the people noted in this study will give depth and understanding to the question of where the museum got its power.

The group of persons in closest relationship with the museum during its formation was the collectors of art who went on to become the museum's trustees. It was from these men, and very few women, of wealth and influence that the museum in America got its first role model, organizational input, collection of artwork, drive, energies and all the attributes necessary to have brought the museum to its subsequent position of importance. These collector/trustees set forth in the museums they founded, the goals and objectives which reflected their attitudes and tried to make certain that those who followed in similar positions of power within the museum, would strive to maintain those or similar aspirations for the museum.

Museum founders in the 1870's responded to a combination of impulses which propelled them to cooperation. Some had acquired a strong

admiration for the European museums they had experienced in their travels abroad and a desire for similar centers for their respective towns and cities. The promise of cultural growth which was sparked by these visions was a powerful motivational force and groups of businessmen and professional men gathered to discuss how this could best be accomplished. Some Americans wished to duplicate the European museums, and the architectural designs executed for the first American public museums reflect this trend; while others, familiar with the European's general condescending attitude toward America's cultural status, sought to prove the American system superior to all others by establishing museums which would really teach about the artwork displayed there.⁷¹

In New York, art enthusiasts watched helplessly as the much admired collection of Luman Reed, the New York grocer who opened his private collection to the public, was dispersed in 1854. They lamented the absence of a suitable organization to assume authority for similar collections and longed for a National Collection of which they could be proud. They organized and sponsored a meeting at which civic minded men such as John Jay, William Cullen Bryant and Joseph Choate were among the three hundred people who attended the first public gathering, and which would result in the formation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 1869.⁷² The concept of a national gallery was introduced to the public that evening, by members of the Union League Club, who had discussed its feasibility for two years prior to the meeting. It was generally acknowledged that getting the

⁷¹Miller, p. 11.

⁷²Winifred Howe, The History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: Arno Press, 1974), p. 103.

right people for this ambitious enterprise was the key issue, as Dr. Henry Bellows warned in his letter to the committee in charge, because "men of affairs and enterprise and executive ability are seldom interested in art or marked with taste and appreciation of the delicate interests of the beautiful: and artists, a brooding, dreamy, meditative class . . . are seldom men of practical wisdom, push and enterprise."⁷³ The initial committee chosen to organize the museum contained only four artists out of the fifty members chosen.

The men attending the first meeting in New York were merchants, architects, clergymen, lawyers and artists, according to the New York Times review of the event. They were addressed by William Cullen Bryant about the need for a museum to satisfy a void, as the only source for an art experience available at that time was from the private collector, by invitation. Bryant also refers to other determining impulses including a reference to Luman Reed in the first sentence:

But in our own country, when the owner of a private gallery of art desires to leave his treasures where they can be seen by the public, he looks in vain for an institution to which he can send them. A public-spirited citizen desires to employ a favorite artist upon some great historical picture: here are no walls on which to hang in public sight. A large collection of works of art, made at great cost, and with great pains, gathered perhaps during a lifetime, is for sale in Europe. We may find here men willing to contribute to purchase it, but if it should be brought to our country, there is no edifice here to give it hospitality.⁷⁴

Collectors and businessmen were the two groups most sought after to be the founders and leaders of the public art museums.⁷⁵ The collectors were especially important because they could assist the new institutions

⁷³Tomkins, p. 17.

⁷⁴Howe, pp. 108-109. (Bryant's address given Nov. 23, 1869.)

⁷⁵Grace Glueck, "Power and Esthetics: The Trustee," in Museums in Crisis, ed. by Brian O'Doherty, (New York: George Braziller, 1972), p.122.

with both art and money, the latter usually a prerequisite for the former. The businessman for whom art was an interest, was, as mentioned by Dr. Bellows, a rare occurrence, but well worth the search. When successful, a man with the knowledge of how to make money could be encouraged to share both that knowledge and its direct product with the museum of his choice. These men, and before too long, their wives, friends, sisters and daughters, gave the museums their worldly goods and their ability to use that to attract more of the same.

The charters of each of the museums founded since the 1870's have consistently included the building of a collection as the museum's first priority, toward an educational objective. In Boston, its museum charter states that the purpose of the museum is to make, maintain and exhibit collections of works of art, and to afford instruction in the Fine Arts.⁷⁶ John Walker, the first Director of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., states candidly that his entire staff was without any museum experience, but they were chosen for their ability to attract potential collectors to the museum, rather than for any other reason.⁷⁷ The acquisition of a collection as the most important of museum priorities provided the collectors with a consistent sense of power at the apex of museum operations, which they avidly guarded. The private collector was the role model for the public museum, then as a founder and trustee, gave the museum its sense of direction in establishing its charter and goals; in doing so, the collectors established a sound place for themselves within its basic framework.

⁷⁶ Julia de Wolf Addison, *The Boston Museum of Fine Arts* (Boston: L. C. Page & Co., Inc., 1924), p. xv. (The Museum of Fine Arts Charter-2/4/1870.)

⁷⁷ Walker, p. 35.

The collectors were the most powerful of museum trustees because they used their collections, offering its use or withholding same, in order to reinforce their undeniable importance to the museums they served. But these same collectors shared a commitment to the artwork they collected and to the quality presentations of this and other art in the museum, in the public interest. They were, therefore, the group most often found donating a new wing, gallery, or funds for the purchase of a collection which the museum needed. Although their motivation was partially self-serving, this group was unquestionably the source for museum funding which made the growth of that institution such a formidable accomplishment.⁷⁸ More than any other institution developing in the twentieth century, the art museum has been associated with the wealthiest and most powerful people this country has known and from this constant and close contact the museum has assimilated much of its sense of authority. The museum is an institution aware of its position and power and it operates with the self-assuredness of those who were instrumental in developing those qualities.

New York's Metropolitan Museum, like many others, had no collection for its first two years. Its founders had donated time and money but withheld donations of artwork until the museum had established itself, usually by attracting public subscription to the nascent museum. In Boston, the museum inherited the collection of artwork from the Boston Athenaeum, but its Board of Trustees, generous enough to run the museum solely with volunteers from the Board working to keep it open for the first several years of its existence, nevertheless withheld its artwork until it had proven its worthiness.⁷⁹

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 67.

⁷⁹Walter Muir Whitehill, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 43.

The artwork first loaned and later donated by the collector/trustees established the level of quality and influenced the artistic taste in each respective museum. When the collectors began to offer the use of their collections, the museums gladly accepted because of the diversity this provided to their initially meager permanent collections. Having little other choice, as the collectors offering their collections were most often members of a board which would also be accepting that offer, there was little doubt that the offer would be accepted. As a board member, the acceptance by the museum of an offer to loan one's collection was virtually assured. Many trustees were sought for museum boards because of the quality of their collections; conversely, and the museums then built fine collections in this manner. The public's image of museum quality artwork was established in the process and included, among the first wave of museum exhibitions, paintings with inaccurate or unspecific attributions and plaster copies of the great European statues which Americans did not believe they could ever own. These were removed as contributions increased and came to include a larger number of improved quality pieces.

The public's taste for art was also formulated during this period by the availability of certain periods and mediums and the absence of others. New Yorkers, for instance, had developed a greater awareness for the artistic appreciation of arms and armor because of the fine collection at the Metropolitan Museum than was afforded the museum goers of Chicago, where there was no comparable collection. Conversely, in Chicago, the Art Institute was the first and foremost American museum to exhibit the Impressionist paintings collected initially by Martin Ryerson and

Mrs. Potter Palmer.⁸⁰

The second group of importance to the unique development of the public art museum is a loose association of people related to the museum's development in a support capacity. This group influenced the collectors/trustees, rather than the museums directly, and were very instrumental in shaping the collections which would become part of the museums. The grouping includes the artist-advisers such as Mary Cassatt and William Glackens, who counselled Mrs. Potter Palmer and Albert Barnes, respectively, and greatly influenced, if not educated, their respective collectors on their purchases. Burgeoning university art galleries and art museums were helping to encourage the scholarly investigation of art history in the second half of the nineteenth century and produced the first trained art historians and connoisseurs, such as Bernard Berenson and Roger Fry, who later entered the museum profession. Philosophers of the mid-nineteenth century and the private collectors had helped to encourage the collection of art as a worthwhile pursuit, but these people actually helped to determine which art the collectors were buying.

Among the most successful members of this group was the art dealer -- both in his ability to affect what the collector bought and also succeeding to profit from those same purchases. He, too, benefited from the connoisseurs and artist-advisers with whom he came in contact, learning from them the information sought by aspiring collectors. Among those who prospered buying and selling art, Joseph Duveen was the most successful. He was instrumental in determining the direction taken by several prominent collectors and the museums with which they were affiliated, especially

⁸⁰ Aline Saarinen, The Proud Possessors (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 6.

during his association with the Renaissance scholar Bernard Berenson.

The exhibitions presented by the public museums allowed the public to see the collections of some of the most successful and wealthiest businessmen and professionals, and they soon realized that collecting art was more than just a frivolous pastime for the super-rich. There existed, however, few available persons, books or resources for the collector to address when seeking assistance in this matter. The artist's ability to assist in such matters was often limited by his own education his sense of commitment to the person he was advising, in direct relationship to his own resources. What the public really needed was a reliable handbook to which they could turn for information and explanation, uncolored by personal feelings. Bernard Berenson attempted and came closest to giving them just that.

Berenson's impact through his books and lists of attributions had a far reaching effect on collecting art in general and helped improve its popular appeal.⁸¹ Although his area of expertise was the Italian Renaissance, his forthright approach and lucid writing style helped attract collectors not interested in collecting from the period of which he wrote. He took a difficult subject, the Renaissance, both mystifying for the richness of its treasures and confusing because of them and helped to simplify and sort out the important material. Because Berenson was so excited and committed to tidying up that confusing period, he helped to rediscover artists of merit previously unrecognized for their talent and influence within that period.

⁸¹ John Russell Taylor and Brian Brooks, The Art Dealers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 15.

Berenson went to Europe after graduating from Harvard in 1887, on a traveling fellowship sponsored by several wealthy Bostonians, among them the collector, Isabella Stewart Gardner.⁸² He had chosen to be a writer and his European experiences helped him to decide on the direction through which he chose to channel his writing. While traveling, he was greatly affected by the artwork he encountered, especially the Renaissance paintings, as he had also become acquainted with Walter Pater's Studies in the History of the Renaissance.

Kenneth Clark makes clear that the other important influence on Berenson was the method of attribution formulated by Giovanni Morelli.⁸³ The Morellian method for determining the artist of a given work employed the examination of the parts of a painting executed without much inspiration, but rather with an unconscious consistency, in most cases. Morelli was originally trained as a physiologist and Berenson found his theory, along with his own desire to write, the key to his vocational search.⁸⁴

The real importance of Berenson's impact lies in his standards of excellence. Before the Drawings of the Florentine Painters (actually finished in 1898 and published in 1903), no other formidable connoisseurs had combined a well thought-out method of attribution with scholarly writing. Pater, who wrote his Studies in 1868, and even Muntz, who was a contemporary of Berenson's, could claim very few correct attributions. Berenson's Drawings, of the same year as Muntz's, is absolutely accurate in all the work it covers.⁸⁵

⁸²Hanna Kiel, Looking at Pictures with Bernard Berenson (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), p. 28.

⁸³Kenneth Clark, "Bernard Berenson," Burlington Magazine, Sept. 1960: 381-85.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 382.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 381.

At the turn of the century, Berenson's famous "lists," the extraordinary culmination of his very methodical survey and intelligence, were being developed and consumed by dealers and collectors. Berenson greatly enhanced the popularity of this period by expanding the limits of the period and clearly stating all the relevant information. The advice he gave to Isabella Stewart Gardner helped her to build the fabulous collection which now bears her name near Boston's Fenway Park.

Joseph Duveen, the art dealer, and Berenson formed a partnership in which Berenson authenticated and confirmed attributions for Duveen's clients, including Andrew Mellon, J. P. Morgan and many of the wealthiest art collectors of the time.⁸⁶ Berenson was on a retainer from the dealer until the 1940's, when their opinion on an important attribution differed, neither one willing to concede. The split that ensued was very hard on Duveen, personally, who greatly depended on Berenson's expertise, which had helped build Duveen's dealership into the most lucrative in the market.

Duveen had played a big part, with Berenson's unwitting help, in making the art market as exceptionally inflated and frenetic as it would stand. He did this by paying top dollar for the pieces he purchased, even when the situation did not require it, just so he could then charge a greatly increased price from his clients, who believed that the greater the cost, the greater the work. He also shrewdly encouraged his clients to buy with the idea of donating to the museums, for two important reasons: firstly, the tax benefits for the collector were sizeable if the work was purchased for the museum, even if the collector kept the artwork until he wished to donate it. Secondly, the high-priced artwork destined for the

⁸⁶Taylor and Brooks, p. 15.

museum would not again appear in the artmarket to test its value against the large price Duveen's clients had paid for it. This very ingenious plan worked well to make Duveen a very wealthy man and provided the art museum with much of its finest art.⁸⁷ Duveen always charged the highest prices, especially when the art market began to dry up and the rarity of any of the masterpieces for sale helped to inflate its importance and value.

The inflation Duveen encouraged created an extremely rarified environment for the purchase of art which has steadily increased since his time. It put many of the art dealers out of business, due to the prohibitive cost of maintaining a selection from which a client might choose. The art auction has become the most popular method of acquiring and disposing of artwork in the twentieth century, and the museum's professional staff became the collector's advisers, especially if they were trustees. By providing these services and ingratiating themselves with the trustees, the curators elevated themselves from their previously subjugated position within the museum's hierarchy to one of respect, but consistently limited authority.

The collector was increasingly wedded to the museum by the prevailing tax laws which allowed the collector to bring into the United States any artwork, duty-free, if it was destined for a public museum. This 'deferred gift' allowed the collector to retain possession of the work until it suited him to actually hand the artwork over to the museum. In most cases, the museum could borrow the work as it was needed until the time that it actually was given the piece. It became fairly common

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Ibid., p. 41.

practice for museums to borrow frequently and for extended periods from the collector/trustees with whom they were closely aligned. These same trustees helped formulate museum policy which allowed the museum to offer special services to the lenders, such as the conservation work on paintings destined for that museum, while still owned by the collector, storage and insurance on artwork and advice on improving their collections, thereby making it a more likely possibility that the collection would enter the most accommodating museum. The trustees benefited handsomely from these arrangements and the museums essentially were investing in their futures. This practice also served to enhance the appeal of board membership for the collector who saw how he could help the museum, but wondered why he should.

The financial arrangement of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with the City of New York parallels that of other public museums, albeit on a grand scale. As a public institution, most received a building, its maintenance and salaries paid from the taxes allotted for that purpose.⁸⁸ For the building of a collection and the purchase of artwork, the museum was totally dependent on the donations it received from its trustees for this purpose. The trustees owned the collection and it was increased according to their will and persuasiveness. Specific donations were sought for the purchases which the trustees felt merited such an effort, such as the Cesnola Collection for the Metropolitan.⁸⁹

The collections were expanded in this manner or by the donation of individual pieces of artwork or whole collections. The Catherine L. Wolfe

⁸⁸Tomkins, p. 41.

⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 56-57.

Collection was accepted by the Metropolitan's Board in 1887 along with her bequest of \$200,000.⁹⁰ This was the museum's first large donation and the first of many with specific instructions for the future care and display of the objects in the collection. Many donors chose this method of leaving their artwork with the comforting idea that they could control its destiny even after they had gone, and as long as the museum needed to build its collection, it remained workable. The concept began to lose its appeal when the instructions left by the donor conflicted with what the museum's board saw as best for the museum and its collection, and the donor's wishes were usually disregarded. Specific instructions such as the isolated exhibition of a collection or its exhibition only in its entirety or deaccessioning in a specified manner were often not in the museum's best interest and the trustees balked at the constraints they had accepted years ago. Although the museums gained a great deal of fine artwork by entering these agreements, the problems they posed later led Laurence Vail Coleman to put this practice into sharp perspective:

In tracing the course of collecting . . . we shall see how the benefactor, making his gifts, has created lasting problems of management as well as rich collections.⁹¹

At the turn of the century, with the advent of improved connoisseurship and owing to a more open art market on the European scene, the trustees began to feel that they no longer were obliged to have terms dictated for the acceptance of collections with binding restrictions about its display and disbursement because collections and bequests were becoming more and more plentiful. The collector had the choice, then, of

⁹⁰Howe, p. 211.

⁹¹Coleman, p. 31.

eliminating the restrictions on his gift or taking it to another museum willing to comply with his wishes. The Metropolitan turned down the collection of Senator William Clark in 1925 because of his stipulation that it be exhibited as a whole.⁹² The collection was accepted that same year by the Corcoran Gallery in D.C. and continues to be exhibited there on the second floor.

The Jacob S. Rogers surprise bequest of \$5 million marked a turning point for the Metropolitan, catapulting it into an age of independence and increased power. Rogers had been a regular museum member before his death, paying his \$10 annually. When his estate was finally settled the museum began to receive \$200,000 in interest annually with which they could purchase art -- clearly a substantial amount at the turn of the century and only recently becoming dwarfed by the tremendously inflated prices for art in today's market.⁹³ It is the donations of this magnitude to which John Walker refers when he states that the private sector, especially the collectors, have made possible our wonderful museums, rather than the public funds which the museums receive.⁹⁴

As the museum began to buy for itself, it came upon another problem from within its trustee/collector group. The same people who often bought for the museum were also buying for themselves. William S. Blodgett, the Metropolitan trustee who purchased the three private European collections as the beginning of the Met's collection was also a collector himself, in

⁹²Tomkins, p. 190.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 87-90.

⁹⁴Walker, p. 67.

Europe for that purpose. He was highly praised by the museum's board when the collection arrived and they were able to inspect it with satisfaction, because he had kept none of the works for his own collection.⁹⁵ Other collectors were not as generous, and a curator proposing an object for the board's consideration always ran the risk of having an enterprising trustee purchase it for himself. As much of the trustee's collections found their way to the museum in time, either for loan or donation, the museum often had the benefit of the object in the end.

J. P. Morgan was one trustee who was notorious for not making clear his intentions for purchases for his own collection or that of the Metropolitan, where he served as President for nine years and on whose behalf he purchased and donated many of that museum's finest objects.⁹⁶ When he died, in 1913, over 50% of his estate was tied up in his art collection, much of which was donated or purchased by the Metropolitan.

Of all the collector/trustees to actively influence the public art museums, few imparted so effectively the message that surety of action and the power of authority could be used with such commanding results as J. P. Morgan. With his great fortune and powerful demeanor behind him, he became the most sought-after client of the art market although he did not begin buying art until he was well into his sixties. A purchase by Morgan assured publicity and an important association with a very important man whose signature conveyed good taste and an expensive price tag. The museum with which he became most closely connected, the Metropolitan, also came to embody these Morganese characteristics, such as the disregard

⁹⁵Howe, p. 137.

⁹⁶Tomkins, pp. 107-110.

or modification of rules for the benefit of the museum, especially in building the collection.

A vivid example of the Morgan touch came at the crucial turning point in the Met's forty year quest for the fabulous Riggs Collection of Arms and Armor. William H. Riggs was an American with whom Morgan had attended boarding school in Switzerland. Riggs had settled in Paris as the home base for his collection of the finest European arms and armor. Many museums courted Riggs for his collection and he encouraged them all, until his old friend Morgan solidified his commitment to the Metropolitan by becoming its president in 1904. Shortly thereafter, Morgan instructed Bashford Dean, the curator for arms and armor, that the Riggs Collection was top priority and Dean persisted until Riggs decided that he would follow his friend's lead and make the Met the home for his collection.

Calvin Tomkins' lengthy and highly amusing account of the very intricate tactics used in this decisive win for the Metropolitan is representative of an era of intense jockeying for collections involving all of the major art museums throughout the world.⁹⁷ It vividly illustrates the strong position of the very astute collectors in getting the museums to dance to their tune.

Although Riggs had decided on the Metropolitan, he kept putting off the important cataloguing and packing due to a slight, but urksome problem. The small annoyance turned out to be a grand old French hotel which Riggs wished to be rid of. His pride, however, as a successful businessman, prevented him from selling the notoriously unsuccessful hotel at a loss.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 154-164.

Dean's hopes for eliminating this bothersome snag to the Met's acquisition were small as he sought Morgan's advice on the matter. Morgan's solution and reply reflect his confidence and sense of authority; he would buy the hotel, as he could surely afford the loss of a "couple of hundred thousand francs. Not a bad investment if the museum gets a collection worth \$3 million!"⁹⁸

Dean was impressed and pleased by Morgan's generosity and command of the situation: the sale soon took place and the Riggs Collection was duly catalogued and shipped, making the Metropolitan one of the world's top five collections of arms and armor.

The story does not end here, however, as Bashford Dean still had to manage the French hotel for five more years, after which it was sold at a huge loss. Morgan's copious decision to buy the old hotel was put onto the museum's account and it was the museum which bore the financial burden of Morgan's instant solution, although it also harvested the fruits. Morgan's presidency at the Metropolitan was characterized by episodes such as this, in which his will took precedence over aspects of museum policy. Others, such as Stephen Clark at the Museum of Modern Art and Robert Rowan at the Pasadena Museum were as autocratic in their presidencies as Morgan, but they lacked the enormous wealth and power to command as much authority as he did. Many trustees were similarly pompous and self-righteous, but few made such lasting impressions on the general public as did Morgan, that the pursuit of art was a worthwhile and fulfilling ambition.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 161.

The collectors and the museums had the same goals for the future and these helped to cement their bonds. The more the collector could enhance the museum in which his collection would be housed, the more impressive his collection would seem -- and so the collectors became the museum's best benefactors and trustees. A sizeable amount of the museum's efforts went towards enhancing and expanding those relationships built between the museums and the wealthy patrons. Of all the officers and members of the board of the new National Gallery chosen in 1938, none, with the sole exception of Duncan Phillips had had any previous museum experience, but were chosen instead for their ". . .charm, sophistication, savoir-faire -- all important in carrying out our major objectives, to snare collectors . . ." ⁹⁹ The founder of the National Gallery, Andrew Mellon, felt certain that his combination of an enticingly handsome building and a charming curatorial staff would produce a favorable response from the most influential collectors in this country. Very unlike Morgan in his method of securing an unparalleled art collection, Mellon was unassuming and quietly determined that the National Gallery would be a stately tribute to the American people. His calculations were precise and the National Gallery is now the home of the collections of renown art assembled by Samuel and Rush Kress, Chester Dale, Joseph Widener and the Mellons.

The museum's board of directors was especially helpful in this pursuit by recruiting friends and relatives into its ranks. ¹⁰⁰ The museum's base for collections was expanded in this manner, but so too

⁹⁹Walker, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰Meyer, p. 224.

was its clickishness and what Alan Shestack refers to as its "country-club atmosphere."¹⁰¹ Enticements to join this elite group of museum policy makers included the assurance that one would be in the best company, a group where each assured the others that they would do their fair share. Their numbers increased, and as it did, so did their sense of power at the very core of the museum's existence. The museums flourished under their control, due to their wealth and influence.

As the boards grew, the price for attracting and keeping these wealthy people interested in a specific museum grew in direct proportion. The curatorial staff was pressed into service helping trustees with their collections on questions of scholarship, in conservation and display of their collections.¹⁰² Demanding collectors used their collections as bait to exact concessions from the museum and played off one another for the best service. John Walker describes the petty jealousies between Rush Kress and Chester Dale and his own tireless quest to solidify each of their commitments to the National Gallery before their mutual antagonism sent one or both to another museum.¹⁰³

Another method for attracting and keeping the collector utilized by the art museum was to include the works of the former's collection in an exhibition. This flattering arrangement benefited both the museum and the collector in many ways. For the museum, the possibility of borrowing works from friendly collectors increased greatly its ability to cover many

¹⁰¹Alan Shestack, "The Director: Scholar & Businessman, Educator & Lobbyist," Museum News, Nov.-Dec. 1978: 27-31.

¹⁰²Lynes, p. 38.

¹⁰³Walker, p. 173.

areas of the arts beyond which its own collection consisted: thereby increasing its impact as an educational facility and allowing the public access to works they may never have had a chance to see. The museum also expressed its need for such a work by having to borrow it and reinforced its desire to include the piece in its collection. The collector enjoys the security benefits which the museum can offer and the vilification of his taste and art wisdom implied by the request. The value of museum exposure to the artwork involved is sure to improve its value and adds historical value to the piece. The exchange of gratitude and good will which may follow such an arrangement are of inestimable value, especially to the museum.

This process, however, brought intense criticism because of the extent and intent of its usage. The trustees who proposed an exhibition in which their collections would play a part ran the risk of a potential conflict-of-interest charge. It was impossible for the trustee not to benefit if his work was in an exhibition. Royal Cortissoz, the art critic for the New York Herald Tribune, consistently accused the trustees at the Museum of Modern Art of such self-serving practices, for which that board of trustees was especially vulnerable owing to the fact that the art it collected was so recently past history.¹⁰⁴ Without any restrictions or guidelines except for those which the trustees made for themselves, the problems this practice fostered continued until the 1970's when the American Association of Museums set up guidelines which trustees could follow.

Germain Bazin credits this same lack of controls and regulations

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Lynes, p. 66.

and the visible lack of government interference with the unprecedented growth and diversity of the American museums.¹⁰⁵ Other museum observers, such as Karl Meyer, find the lack of guidelines the major cause for the self-serving attitude of museum trustees which holds them legally accountable to no one. Common practice at some of the biggest museums has included the acceptance of smuggled or stolen artwork, which they had to keep hidden until the statute of limitations had run out. A variety of unsavory deaccessioning practices have also come to the attention of the public, with the same goal in mind -- that of building a better collection.¹⁰⁶

The founders and trustees of museums in America today share most of the same attitudes of the trustees before them -- their wealth and valued status with the museum entitle them to special privileges.¹⁰⁷ Norton Simon's constant wheeling and dealing with his art collections has earned him a notorious reputation in the art world. Prior to the establishment of the Norton Simon, Incorporated Museum, it was Simon's practice to loan out the larger part of his collection and rotate the pieces so as best to take advantage of the security and insurance benefits offered by the museums and to avoid California personal property taxes. By law, any work loaned to a public institution for more than six months was not subject to these taxes and Simon's very intricate registration system allowed him to take full advantage of this law. The public museums were very happy to accomodate Simon and his fine collection of mostly

¹⁰⁵Bazin, p. 278.

¹⁰⁶Karl E. Meyer, The Plundered Past (New York: Atheneum, 1973), pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁷Rich, p. 137.

Asian and 19th century Masters until he began to modify the general rules between museums and lenders of artwork to suit his erratic style. Simon's credibility as a lender was badly damaged after he withdrew pieces from his collection with 24 hours notice to be auctioned without replacing them.¹⁰⁸ Museums began to question the wisdom of committing advertising and handling efforts to pieces which might not be on loan long enough to make them worthwhile.

Of those museum founders and collectors around whom our finest institutions have developed, one man stood apart because of his generosity, insight and determination -- Andrew Mellon. It was his dream, like so many others before him, that the United States should have a truly exemplary collection of art in a National Gallery. Mellon purchased with that goal in mind, among other things, 42 paintings from the Hermitage Museum for \$21,000,000.¹⁰⁹ The United States government accepted Mellon's gift of a museum, his collection and an endowment fund as part of the Smithsonian Institution in 1937. Mellon knew that a truly spectacular building would attract other fine collections and he also knew that the right staff was a necessity to maintain the standards he had had set, through Congressional law, for the National Gallery. He set aside funds to pay the director and staff because he knew of the government's limitations in that area.¹¹⁰ Through his board of directors and his heirs, although he did not live to see it, Mellon's plan for a National Gallery of distinction has been

¹⁰⁸ John Coplans, "Pasadena's Collapse and the Simon Takeover," Artforum, Feb., 1975: p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Niels von Holst, Creators, Collectors and Connoisseurs (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), p. 279.

¹¹⁰ Walker, p. 37.

realized and continues to excel, most recently through the addition of the East Building in 1978.

The great period for collection-building continued into the 1940's when the Second World War all but immobilized the European art market. The art museums in America enjoyed much popularity during that period and experienced a new sense of professionalism from the first wave of trained museum professionals. This was due greatly to the efforts of Paul J. Sachs, a Harvard art history professor, whose students included among them, "the future directors of the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art . . ." ¹¹¹ Sachs instilled in his students the necessity of establishing a credo for museum professionals concerned with presenting scholarly and interesting exhibitions and thereby quality institutions. They were taught how to research and present an exhibition, how to administer a museum and how to deal with a board of directors. As Sach's students and the others being trained in museum techniques began to infiltrate the museum ranks, a new energy was felt in the museum presentations.

The period of greatest interest to this investigation, the early twentieth century, saw little or no improvement in the caliber of museum professionals until Sach's students matriculated. Although some fine scholars had aspired to the directorships and curatorial positions prior to that period, the limited authority parceled out by the trustees seems to have nullified most of the contributions these men and women made.

A mere handful are noteworthy: Roger Fry, a Renaissance scholar, and his fellow Englishman, Sir Purdon Clarke; both came to the Metropolitan

¹¹¹ Meyer, The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics, p. 41.

around 1905, only to find J. P. Morgan too powerful a force to accept. Clarke's health deteriorated steadily with his move to America and he was forced to resign, because of it, in 1909. The bad chemistry between Fry and Morgan, then the president of the Metropolitan, caused a bitter rift which forced his resignation in that same year.¹¹²

William Mills Ivins, Jr., also a curator at the Metropolitan, assembled that Museum's print collection during his 30 years there, from 1916-1946. Ivins, a New York lawyer, had collected prints since his student days at Harvard with such enthusiasm for that medium that he abandoned his law practice and took a substantial decrease in salary to accept the curatorial position at the Metropolitan. His wise purchases and attention to detail helped to make that collection one of the museum's finest.

Alfred Barr, Jr., became the first director of the Museum of Modern Art at Paul Sach's suggestion, in 1929, shortly after the concept for that museum began to take shape. Barr's credentials for that position included the first course taught on Modern Art which he developed for his classes at Wellesley in 1926, in which he encouraged the investigation of all the creative arts including painting, sculpture, photography, movies, theatre, architecture and the design of industrial products in order to thoroughly understand modernism.¹¹³ Although it was his plan to make the museum reflect this ambitious view of Modern Art, he wisely withheld this viewpoint from his board of directors for fear of frightening them with his zealously.

¹¹²Tomkins, p. 103.

¹¹³Lynes, p. 80.

A subtle shift in authority took place with the hiring of Barr and his contemporaries. For the first time in most museums, the director, as the person in command of the administrative duties, also possessed an acknowledged superiority in artistic matters. Paul Sachs had taught his charges well. They knew their academic and administrative lessons and they also knew that keeping their positions would often depend on keeping in mind that the museum's power was with the board of trustees.¹¹⁴

The Museum of Modern Art became a leader in the field of museology because of the commitment and professionalism of its director and curatorial staff. Barr was an exemplary director, always in search of methods to make his subject communicate better and in the process he developed new and different methods of presentation, informative labeling, and catalogue preparations which greatly enhanced the artwork. Barr began the practical arrangement of artwork by stylistic groupings which facilitated the understanding of each piece in relationship to others with similar concerns.¹¹⁵ He and the other young staff members at the museum, among them Jere Abbott, Dorothy Miller, and Philip Johnson, were propelled to a total commitment to modern art. Their combined youthful energies and devotion to their work and to what Alfred Barr envisioned for the museum, was a force which made that museum and modern art more than just an artistic designation. Because Barr's concept touched such a wide variety of mediums, it became a pervasive attitude, not unlike Surrealism or Constructivism, for him and his coworkers. They exemplified the modern spirit Barr proposed.

¹¹⁴Walker, p. 54.

¹¹⁵MacDonald, p. 77.

The professional museum directors and curators assumed more and more authority for determining exhibitions and purchases from their respective governing boards in the 1930's and 40's. The trustees still had final approval on what the museum presented and purchased, but an eloquent director could accomplish much in this area.¹¹⁶ Curators formed strong bonds with those collector/trustees who shared their area of expertise and a give-and-take relationship developed, useful to the collector in the form of assistance in collection-building; useful to the curator in his quest for recognition in the museum hierarchy. The loyalties and commitments between the trustees and the curators in the large public museums resulted in many intricate power struggles which added to management problems which still continue.

The trustees felt confident in allowing those experts they had hired to prevail within their area of expertise. A matter as clear-cut as what should or should not be explored in a museum presentation requires a subjective decision, however, and curators and the director depend on many factors in such a determination.¹¹⁷ It is their responsibility to present a viewpoint knowing that it will be accepted as a definitive statement because it is being presented by an art museum.

Riva Castleman, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, credits the traveling exhibits presented by that museum which she saw as a youngster growing up in Iowa in the 1950's with creating her taste in art.¹¹⁸ As a

¹¹⁶Meyer, p.15.

¹¹⁷Larson, p. 38.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

curator, she now assembles presentations based on that taste and is conscious of her responsibility to the public to exhibit artwork with relevance. This realization makes the museum both aware of its obligation and aware of its power to influence taste and opinion through its presentations.

The director is held responsible to the museum's board of trustees for the actions of his staff. He is praised or chided for their efforts and can hopefully inspire and contain them. It is the museum's director to whom we look for many skills, including those of the "art historian and connoisseur, business person and fundraiser, diplomat, politician, lobbyist, personnel manager, publisher, architectural consultant, restaurateur, educator, after-dinner speaker, and resident-psychoanalyst."¹¹⁹ Especially as the museum's scope became more encompassing, the director was expected to be the liason between the public and the trustee.

As the position is a difficult one, so too are those who have successfully aspired to it, often difficult. Caught in the squeeze between the amateurs in control and the professionals who think they should be, the directors of art museums are often the victims of dissent. Thomas P. F. Hoving was just such a director, at the Metropolitan, where his laudable benefits to that institution were only outnumbered by the problems he created there.¹²⁰ Even Alfred Barr, Jr., for all his expertise and positive attributes, was basically uncommunicative and because he made some of his trustees feel foolish, his relationship with them suffered and his

¹¹⁹Shestack, p. 27.

¹²⁰Meyer, p. 92.

career stalled.¹²¹

The public art museum's ability to grow and adapt to the world in which it operates was greatly enhanced and simultaneously hampered by those at the center of its power. Its founders, the collectors/trustees gave it the soundness and fortitude of their own positive outlook, their collections and fortunes and the ability to attract more of the same. They also promoted an elitist attitude incompatible with the democratic society in which the museum must function. The artistic advisers, connoisseurs and art-dealers operated at much the same level more often than not.

Museum professionals entered museums at a time when many museums had already acquired the bulk of their collections. In their liaison capacity, they adapted a more democratic viewpoint which rewarded flexibility and diplomacy toward those less fortunate, the smaller museums and the struggling artist. Indeed, it seems obvious to point out, that regardless of its many shortcomings, the American art museums continue to provide a service which fulfills the needs of others -- those who make art and those who wish to see it.

¹²¹Lynes, p. 245.

CONCLUSION

The public art museum has taken its years of decisive leadership, its association with influential people and its collection of the world's finest art and has secured its position in American life as one of the country's most important cultural institutions. The loftiness of each museum's position is in direct proportion to the value of its collection. Even in the shakiest of economic or philosophical confusion, the museum seems to convey a resolution of will which helps to see it through the crisis.

The social unrest of the 1960's and the museum's self-evaluation which shook the trustees out of their traditional complacency resulted in a renewed attitude of self-righteousness, if somewhat tempered by the reality of its pitfalls. The trustees came out of that agonizing period with the realization that even when they did address themselves to society's problems, they could not solve them. They could and did make more of an effort to address relevant issues within an art context.¹²²

From the end of World War II, the beginning of improved transportation and a five day work week the attendance at the public art museums has risen steadily. The attendance figures for the museums became their most accurate measure for their benefit to the public. The trustees used these figures to justify their own methods and attitudes for running the museum as approved of by the public. It seemed that everyone was happy

¹²²Sherman E. Lee, Editor, On Understanding Art Museums. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 4.

with the museum operating as it did.

And then the museum changed the way it was operating because it felt the need to do more for the public. The vicious cycle of more services for more people at a higher rate of admission led the museums into new buildings, with greater operating costs and the need to attract more people to help pay for it all. This led to new methods of funding and old methods of the museum charisma to attract the corporate sector. The museum is back to doing what it does best--enticing those with power to use it on behalf of the museum.

The large corporations were attracted to the museums for the same reasons the wealthy industrialists had been at the turn of this century. Art is a good investment with very positive cultural connotations and also the tax laws have improved throughout this century for those who loan their collections to public institutions. The museum's "legitimizing effect" can greatly enhance the value of the corporate collection and that makes a mutual association for the corporation and the public art museum a beneficial move for both.

The problems facing today's art institutions are of financial support and management priorities. Many small community museums are struggling alongside the larger art museums for their share of the precious funding of individuals, businesses and governments at every level. These smaller institutions are often faced with the challenge of making a worthwhile institute with a modest budget and how this can best be accomplished. John Canaday suggests the unpopular viewpoint that replicas of high quality can be of value when used in an educational context to fill out a burgeoning collection.¹²³ This is the same theory the museum founders used until the

¹²³John Canaday, "On Small Museums," in Culture Gulch. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 172.

real objects came available and they could afford to replace their copies.

The larger museums could help the growing museums, but it is not in their best interest to do so. Most of the original public art museums have many objects which never are exhibited. These could be loaned to museums where the addition of such objects would greatly enhance the art experience for their viewing audience. The larger museums should also not accept artwork they will never exhibit because it might be given to another institution which would share it with the public.¹²⁴

The large museums, however, know how to play "the museum game" skillfully. They know that each museum which opens and succeeds presents a challenge for funding and gifts which could be theirs alone. The museum trustees also realize that it is a wise practice for them to accept even unwanted gifts in the hopes that the next time that donor gives, it might be a coveted prize.

The larger public art museums are especially divided about how the direction of the museum would be affected under a business expert as opposed to a museum professional. This was one of the considerations discussed when art museum professionals met in 1974 in Harriman, New York. Their feelings were overwhelmingly in favor of the museum professional because of his experience with questions of artistic judgment at that level.¹²⁵ Several museums opting for strong business managers as directors are finding increased difficulty in attracting skilled curators because of the implied priorities of the museum thus motivated.¹²⁶

¹²⁴Montias, p. 31.

¹²⁵Milton Esterow, "The Future of American Museums," Art News. Jan. 1975: 34.

¹²⁶Hilton Kramer, "Has Success Spoiled American Museums?" New York Times. January 14, 1979: 27.

Where there were once no guidelines for the museum's governing bodies to follow, now there are. In 1970, the American Association of Museums (AAM) published a set of guidelines which an organization can use for evaluating itself using standards for accreditation established by that body. The association sponsors periodic meetings such as the one held in Harriman mentioned above where it addresses itself to issues important to its member organizations.

The museum trustees continue to run the museum more than any other faction. The current museum board will probably include one or more governmental officials, usually without voting privileges, in deference to the community or state it serves. A diverse board make-up continues to give each museum its individual flavor, a positive factor in the overall development of that institution. On the negative side, the trustees continue to compete with their museums for acquisitions. Curators are often prohibited from collecting in their area of expertise because of the possibilities for conflict of interest and matters of acquisition.

With increased public attendance there was fostered a desire to know more about this influential institution. The public became cognizant of the lack of cohesiveness in the museum's presentations and soon learned that museum decisions are predicated on benefits to the trustees and the museum itself.¹²⁷ The public recognized its own low priority when its criticism of museum practices of deaccessioning and accepting smuggled art were summarily dismissed. The museum trustees understand a bit about the public fickleness and although they felt the sting of public condemnation,

¹²⁷Harold Rosenberg, p. 236.

the crisis soon was forgotten.

Bad decisions on the part of the trustees can be very damaging. A lack of responsibility to any cause but their own isolates the trustees and causes enmity. This is the case at the Pasadena Art Museum where self-serving trustees disregarded advice by several directors and made a series of imprudent decisions which cost them their museum.¹²⁸ Most cases are not that severe, but the public deserves responsible decisions on the part of its directors and trustees. That is the only way the museums will succeed.

The public art museum is doing what it set out to do: it provides a place for public viewing of a collection of art for which improved methods of conservation are readily available. Though they are not a priority, the public enjoys the art of every age collected by very generous men. The public need not be hampered in their enjoyment by the fact that some of the art is known by its collectors' names, such as the Elgin Marbles or the Raczynski Madonna (by Boticelli).¹²⁹

Museums are neither bad nor good. They are attempts to satisfy an ideal and fall within a wide range in that pursuit. Walter Pach defends the position that even a bad museum is better than none at all because it promotes thoughts about the art it presents and that process, once begun, will filter out the less desirable elements eventually.¹³⁰ The "blockbuster" presentations so popular and profitable for the museums might also fall into this less than optimal situation for the museum.¹³¹ While large crowds

¹²⁸ John Coplans, "Pasadena's Collapse and the Simon Takeover," Artforum, Feb. 1975: 34.

¹²⁹ Niels von Holst, Creators, Collectors and Connoisseurs. (NY: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1967), p. 18.

¹³⁰ Walter Pach, The Art Museum in America. (NY: Pantheon, 1948), p. 78.

¹³¹ Kramer, p. 1.

of people are attracted by these exhibitions, the loyal visitors to the museums are subjected to adverse conditions which hamper their museum visit. This situation provides a large number of people with a reason to visit the museum, many for the first time, in the hopes that they will return for other exhibitions.

The making of art has been affected by the public art museum. Art was once summoned to the museum because it was important, believed to be a valuable testimony to man's creativity. Art is now considered important because it is found in the museum. The museum's ability to "legitimize" a work of art replaces the traditional test of time, academic input and its ability to influence other art with a museum endorsement more important than other evaluations by current standards.

The trustees and their purchasing power are once again at the center of this museum practice. It is the museum's financial capabilities which allows it such a formidable role in determining the art which it legitimizes by exhibition, especially as a part of the collection. In direct reaction to this obsession with the object which is art, a number of art movements were born. Central to the conceptual, earth and minimal art movements of the 1960's and 1970's was the museum's inclination to evaluate art. The artists working with that concern attempted to challenge the museums to be more responsible in their role as chief patrons of the arts and stewards of the public. In so doing it also confirms the museum's ability to make those judgments.

The art museum cannot possibly satisfy the demands of artists, critics, viewers, trustees and curators; it is a compromise.¹³² Devoid of

¹³²Lawrence Alloway and John Coplans, "Talking with William Rubin: The Museum is Not Infinitely Expandable," Artforum. Oct. 1974: 51.

all connotations but the art itself, the museum creates an artificial situation where most art is related thematically or chronologically in a didactic pursuit of information. The art is stripped of its intrinsic value in this pursuit and the museum runs the risk of making its collection little more than an educational tool.

The public art museums operate within a thin margin of success; the public is served, the trustees are served, the artists, and curators are served and all pay dearly for the privilege. The public deserves integrity at all levels of the museum and the museum is most egalitarian when its trustees acknowledge a sense of responsibility for their actions.

The museum is a flawed gem. It stands as testimony on many levels of man's accomplishments and remains the best method of preserving the history of art. Any less would not be worthy of its effort thus far.

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