THE TASTE OF THE SEVENTIES
An Exhibition Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Museum

It is true that no one can wholly define the taste of an earlier era. But with pictures perhaps one can try to recapture some hints that revive the Centennial Seventies. These, as always, were years of transition, a time of beginnings and endings; and the taste of the day was a mixture. With the passage of years the original compound sublimes to re-form in a few residual crystals: a painting, a poem, or perhaps the page of a journal. These seem to us now to contain it in essence. Through these remnants, though flawed and passe to our eyes, we vision the moods that held sway in the day of our Founders.

The museum, with only some slight variation, reflected the taste of the private collector. The transition from private gallery of art in a mansion, to public gallery of art, open to all, for student or visitor, at first was slight, but the luxurious privilege and pride of possession began to give away to the powerful claims of Education and History and the fostering of artistic creation.

The array of paintings and objects of virtù, shown with a free-handed, flowing profusion, somehow recalls the ponderous menus of somber ceremonial banquets tendered to honor ex-President Grant. Their courses on courses of game and madeira, and champagne and oysters, indulged with Dutch relish the prevalent taste for canvasback duck and nourishing barons of beef, very rare. If the paintings in oil remind us of entrees and victuals, the comestible sculpture—cold forms confected of immemorial marble—bring to a sweet and suitable close this nostalgic collation of art.

A. T. G.

ABOVE: Gallery view of the current exhibition illustrating the Taste of the Seventies. Rosa Bonheur’s Horse Fair is the third picture from the left in the lower tier. It was presented to the Museum by Cornelius Vanderbilt.
Art student copying Bonheur's Horse Fair. From "Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper"
ABOVE: View of one of the paintings galleries taken shortly after the collections of the Metropolitan Museum were moved to the building in Central Park (1880).

BELOW: Art gallery in the house of William Waldorf Astor.
Picture gallery and hall in the house of Alexander T. Stewart. Randolph Roger's statue of Nydia appears in the background of the lower photograph. The Museum's version of this figure was acquired as a gift from James Douglas.