The Second Hundred Years

C. DOUGLAS DILLON  President of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

As we celebrate the Centennial of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, it is fitting that we pay tribute to those who have brought us to where we are today, review our current situation and outlook, and propose some guidelines for the future. Just one hundred years ago, the Museum’s first trustees were granted a charter by the legislature of the State of New York to establish in the City of New York a museum and library of art, for the purpose of “encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the application of arts to manufacture and practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction and recreation.”

The goals of the original trustees were ambitious. They proposed, as Joseph Choate put it in his dedication address, to “gather together a more or less complete collection of objects illustrative of the history of art in all its branches, from the earliest beginnings to the present time.” That was indeed a major undertaking, but they were men of large vision and extraordinary tenacity. They wanted a comprehensive collection of the highest quality, housed in a beautiful building, attended and enjoyed by “the working millions,” to use their words, and supported both by the city and by its leading citizens. I would say that in just one hundred years, the goals of the Museum’s founders have largely been achieved.

The last major gap in the Metropolitan’s holdings has now been filled by Governor Rockefeller’s recent generous gift of his great collection of primitive art, and the quality of our collections was crowned this last year by the magnificent gift, through the Lehman Foundation, of the late Robert Lehman’s superb collection of paintings and drawings. It is perhaps the most valuable single donation ever received by the Museum. It lifts the Museum’s holdings in these areas into the very first rank.

The works of art in this museum now range in an almost unbroken line through five thousand years of civilization in all parts of the world. While it is true that in specific areas a number of museums outshine the Metropolitan, and that the job of refining each part of our collection is never quite complete, merely to have brought together under one roof this great reservoir of man’s artistic creation is a truly breathtaking achievement.

It did not come about by chance. High standards have a way of attracting men and women of high quality, and in the Metropolitan’s case, the list of such supporters and leaders is lengthy: John Taylor Johnston, Henry Marquand, General di Cesnola, Jacob Rogers, J. P. Morgan, Benjamin Altman, Edward Robinson, Robert de Forest, Frank Munsey, the Havemeyers, George Blumenthal, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Samuel H.

Contents

The Second Hundred Years
C. DOUGLAS DILLON 369

A Statue of the Composer Grétry
by Jean-Baptiste Stouf
JAMES DAVID DRAPER 377

Leaping the Century Gap
NANCY KUEFFNER 388

Fabulous Fakes
390

Outstanding Recent Accessions
394

Index to Bulletins of 1905-1942
Published 400
Kress, Francis Henry Taylor, and, more recently, James Ronimer, Robert Lehman, Roland Redmond, Arthur Houghton, Thomas Hoving, Nelson Rockefeller, Irwin Untermyer, Lila Acheson Wallace, Brooke Astor, and Charles and Jayne Wrightsman. Space unfortunately does not permit me to name all whose work and generosity have not only helped build the collections here, but have made it possible for the Metropolitan to assemble over the years a first-rate staff, whose contributions to this museum and to art scholarship as a whole are among the Metropolitan’s proudest accomplishments.

Throughout its history, the Museum has enjoyed the steadfast and essential support of the City of New York. It is the city that allocated our land, made possible most of our present building, and every year contributes nearly twenty per cent of our operating budget toward the costs of guardianship and building maintenance. Such visible public interest has assured the Museum’s accountability to the people it serves, and has been a healthy factor in the development of the Metropolitan’s usefulness to our society.

If the Metropolitan Museum has now reached a point where its founders’ early dreams have been satisfied, we must admit that, in today’s terms, they would not be satisfied for long. New needs, new circumstances, and a new vision of what the Museum can and must be constantly rise before us, demanding that we respond and insisting that we move ahead. We have learned from our history that future progress will be neither steady nor easy. But we have also learned that problems are not new to this institution and that occasional stiff doses of diligence, imagination, and—at the proper moment—money are prescribed and will ultimately set most matters right.

As we respond to contemporary needs, we are ruled by two responsibilities: The first is that the Metropolitan Museum is and always has been designed to serve the general public. It is truly a public museum, a place for all who wish to come. We must do everything in our power to keep it that way. And we shall! The second responsibility is to seek out and exhibit the very best in every field of art, from man’s earliest beginnings to the present time. As one of my predecessors, Robert de Forest, said so well, ‘The Museum knows no partisanship in art nor does

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER 9

May 1970

it promote any particular school of art, ancient or modern. It seeks to give the public the opportunity of seeing every kind of art, from everywhere, which any considerable number of people esteem or admire, quite regardless of the particular taste of its officers and trustees.”

The Museum has not always found it easy to live with those two responsibilities. Because America was born a “practical and laborious” nation, to use Joseph Choate’s words, art has long been associated in people’s minds with wealth and leisure. Although wealth and leisure have by no means always been provided to the creators of art, it has been a commonly held view that such blessings are necessary to those who would enjoy art. It is the Metropolitan Museum’s contention that such a notion is fallacious. We intend to dispel it and to build the kind of cultural institution whose programs and exhibitions are readily accessible, to be enjoyed by the broadest possible public. The only elitism that has a place at the Metropolitan is the elitism of excellence.

Our second responsibility – to present the full spectrum of art – has perhaps led us into more difficulties than the first. The collection and display of contemporary art, although it has been part of the Museum’s mandate from the very beginning, has always given Metropolitan lovers, both inside and outside the Museum, the jitters. Robert de Forest and many of his colleagues could find no joy, we are told, not only in the famous nude descending the stairs but in the gentle Cézanne the Museum bought from the Armory Show in 1913. And I know that many of our friends had to swallow hard before our recent Centennial exhibition, New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970, finally left our walls.

Although contemporary art is and must remain but one facet of the Museum’s interest, for the sake of the Metropolitan’s future we must nevertheless maintain a position in this field. The Museum cannot and does not compete with the fine institutions that specialize in contemporary art. Our funds are too limited and, more important, the Museum’s purview is much too broad to allow for such a major effort in contemporary art. But we are grateful for gifts and bequests of contemporary art, and we will continue to purchase it on a modest scale.

Above all, we hope that our friends at The Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim, and the Whitney know that we are prepared to work closely with them and to explore ways in which we can better help one another to further our individual goals as parts of a harmonious effort.

Now what are some of the tasks that lie ahead of us, and how will they be affected by the circumstances of our new century? The qualities that have made the Museum strong in the past must continue to make it stronger still in the future. I refer to the Museum’s dedication to scholarship, its pursuit of excellence in the arts of all periods, its mounting of clear, attractive displays of its holdings, and its provision of education and enrichment to the general public.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan continues as always to be responsive to new needs and ideas, which are gradually changing it into a new kind of public institution. I am sure that you all agree when I say that we would not stop this process even if we could.
Today, after the long period of acquisition in which our predecessors were so conspicuously successful, the Museum has become such a vast storehouse for the study of man's works that our major job is to put it all in sensible and accessible order. This means that we must give our attention to several areas at once.

One of the most important is scholarship. We must increase the Metropolitan’s contribution to the knowledge of our treasured possessions. It is not enough simply to put them on exhibition. We must learn to the best of our ability just where they fit into the stream of art, what factors and what people influenced their creators, and what impact those objects had on their own and later times. The results of such study must be made intelligible, and they should be published. The Museum’s new scholarly journal is a beginning, and our catalogues are proof of the wealth of scholarly talent the Museum has to offer.

But we must make additional efforts. Certainly strengthening our relations with scholars and students elsewhere is a major one. We are fortunate to have the New York University Institute of Fine Arts as our neighbor, and we are grateful for the close cooperation that presently exists between our two institutions. We at the Metropolitan will work even harder to tighten these bonds of common interest. One of the happiest results of our relationship with the Institute, of course, is that it has encouraged so many young people to enter the museum profession, both as curators and conservators. At the last count, I am told, there were more than fifty graduates of the Institute’s museum training program—which is largely conducted at the Metropolitan by our own staff—who are now serving in museums around the country, and the class is growing each year. We are all pleased about such evidence of the spread of the Museum’s benefits to other parts of the country.
The educational aspect of our work is of growing importance. As Francis Henry Taylor, one of our great directors, wrote in his small book, Babel's Tower: “Nothing can convey the dignity of man so wonderfully as a great work of art; no lesson in citizenship can teach so well the inherent nobility of the human being.” In today’s world of science and technology, it is more important than ever to make the joy and understanding of art available on the broadest possible scale, not just here in New York but throughout our country. The Metropolitan Museum has a heavy responsibility in this field, one we shall do our utmost to meet. This is the thrust of such experiments as the College Weekends, which are bringing hundreds of students from colleges and universities all around the country to Centennial exhibitions, and the scholarly symposia that have brought so many of their professors to these same shows.

Hand in hand with scholarship must come popular interpretation. That they are by no means exclusive of each other – but that, in fact, the height of true scholarship is to present great art in simple terms – has been amply demonstrated recently in Lord Clark’s film series, Civilization. And our current exhibition, The Year 1200, is proving to us that a beautiful display of those lovely medieval objects, even when assembled and grouped for maximum benefit to the scholar, can be made an irresistible attraction to the layman as well.

There are still other things that we must do to reach our public more successfully and to better utilize our treasures. As we work to upgrade the quality of our collections – through gifts, bequests, selective purchases, and by a careful weeding out of duplicates and less important works – we will be able to put more objects in circulation, either by
A ceramics storeroom of the Western European Arts Department

Photograph: Stephen L. Murphy

A: New European paintings and decorative arts galleries
B: Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection
C: New European court
D: Lehman Wing
E: American Wing court
F: American Wing
G: Temple of Dendur
H: Osborn playground

Site plan including the construction called for in the master plan. The new buildings for the Lehman Wing and American Wing would occupy 38,300 square feet of planted area on the Museum grounds, but the plan returns to public park 91,900 square feet of Museum grounds that are now paved or inaccessible. The Osborn playground would also be returned to grass.

selling them outright or by arranging long- and short-term loans to other institutions. The improvement of packaging techniques and of the professional staffs of recipient institutions will be of enormous value in making more frequent loan exhibitions a reality. We plan to take an active part in encouraging continued improvement.

At the same time, since we have amassed such a truly comprehensive collection of art, it makes little sense not to have the space to show it properly. It is sometimes suggested that the Metropolitan's collections be dispersed piecemeal around the city. But that is not what the Metropolitan Museum is all about. Our works of art are meant to be studied together, in relation to each other, so that the vast panorama of man's cultural life is spread before our viewers. As Francis Taylor pointed out, "the vaster the collections the greater the opportunity" for study.

Instead of dispersal, what we must work for is a better integration and a more intelligible order in our collections. Although we have made numerous improvements in the building, including much needed air conditioning and better lighting, there has been no addition to our public gallery space since 1926—forty-four years ago.

We need more space for display so that we can show our treasures to best advantage and bring more objects out of storage and into public view where they belong.

We need more space to accommodate our thousands of daily visitors more comfortably.

We must provide for the great Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection of Primitive Art, the magnificent Lehman collection, the Temple of Dendur, and our largely unshown collections of American paintings and decorative arts.

We need more and better facilities for our study collections.

We need enlarged working space for our curatorial staff and visiting scholars.

Rather than pursue these needs at random, we have worked out a master plan with the assistance of the firm of Roche and Dinkeloo. This plan has been described in the press and will be presented in more detail to our members and to the public in a forthcoming publication. Master plans for the Metropolitan Museum are nothing new. The first was drawn up in 1886 when the first building was opened on our present site. What is significant about our present master plan, however, is that it covers a smaller
area than any plan that has gone before. Because parking and service areas are being placed underground, there will be no encroachment on presently usable park space, a consideration to which we have devoted great and careful attention. But even more important, this is a master plan that is no pipe dream. It must and will be put into effect, for it is desperately needed.

The accomplishment of our master plan should once and for all meet our needs for space. It will eliminate unsightly loading and delivery areas, ugly parking lots, and unfinished walls, providing a structure of beauty on all four sides and adding to the attraction of the surrounding park. But this will in no way diminish our interest in helping other museums throughout the city to meet the desires of their own local communities. Through a special trustee committee we are actively exploring ways and means of increasing our effort to cooperate—a effort that can only succeed in response to the wishes of the specific community and in full partnership with its local cultural institutions. We intend to be responsive to these growing needs. This is a useful and workable way to meet the call for decentralization.

All of these changes and activities require more money—certainly no new problem. Financial crises were very familiar in the Museum’s early days, and I note that they constituted an important part of President de Forest’s address on the occasion of our fiftieth birthday.

When I joined the Museum’s Board some twenty years ago, I happened to arrive at a more fortunate time. I well remember being told by the trustee who first approached me that the Metropolitan’s endowment was so comfortable that the trustees would never have to worry about finances.

All that has changed. Our new building program will be expensive. In addition, the rapid increase in operating costs, due largely to the current inflation, is putting us into an untenable position. After years of modest surpluses in our operating accounts, the Museum ran a deficit of $407,013 in fiscal 1968, followed by another of $138,501 in

---

Proposed enclosure for the Temple of Dendur exhibit, located immediately west of the Egyptian galleries, on what is now the 84th Street service area

Model and photograph: Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo, and Associates
fiscal 1969. This year, in part because some of the expenses we had delayed in other years could be put off no longer, we are facing a deficit of about $1 million. Next year, when we feel the impact of the recent city-wide labor agreement for cultural institutions, our deficit will be even larger.

We are doing everything we can to reduce our operating costs, including a careful survey of our operations by a nationally known firm of management consultants. But the problem is too great to find the answer in cost reduction alone. Revenues will also have to be increased substantially. We are studying ways to maximize the income from our present endowment funds and to increase the return from such activities as book publishing and sales in our shops. In addition, since the state and federal governments are now awakening to the problems of cultural institutions, we must vigorously seek their support.

If we cannot contain our deficit in these ways, we will have to find the needed revenue wherever we can. Deficits can only be met out of our operating endowment, which is limited. Continued substantial operating deficits could threaten the very existence of our institution. One way or another, they must be eliminated.

In addition, the soaring market for first-quality art has pretty well swamped our purchase funds in every area, except for medieval art and The Cloisters, where John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s forward-looking philanthropy has protected us. If we are to take advantage of the steadily dwindling opportunities to upgrade and enrich our collections, our purchase funds must also be increased.

All of this means that we soon must mount a truly major effort to raise substantial funds, both for endowment and for necessary construction. Difficult as the job will be, I am confident of success. The Museum is simply too important to the world for us not to succeed.

As we now work to put our house in order, both architecturally and financially, other frontiers lie before us. We must think about what they will mean to the Metropolitan. In the struggle of our city and our nation to build a better life for all our citizens, it is not enough for the Museum to exist simply as a cultural haven. We must be prepared to help in strengthening cultural life beyond our walls.

New techniques – for communication, for documentation, for conservation, for research – are available to us. We must master them and, where it will help us to do our job, make technology work for us.

There are other and broader questions that we have only begun to formulate:

Can we make art more readily comprehensible to the American people?

Can we help promote architectural beauty in the functional world of today?

Can we discover ways to use art better to enlarge American life and help calm our troubled times?

I hope that together we will find affirmative answers to these questions.

I know it is in our hearts to do so.

I trust it is within our capacity as well.