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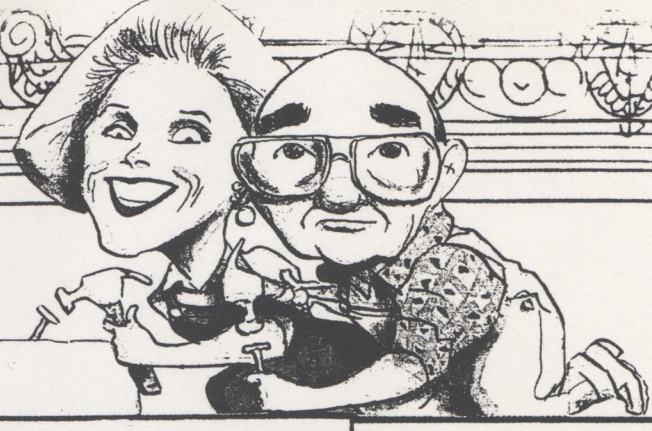
THE HEART AND SOUL
OF FRANCE

A sybarite's hideaway



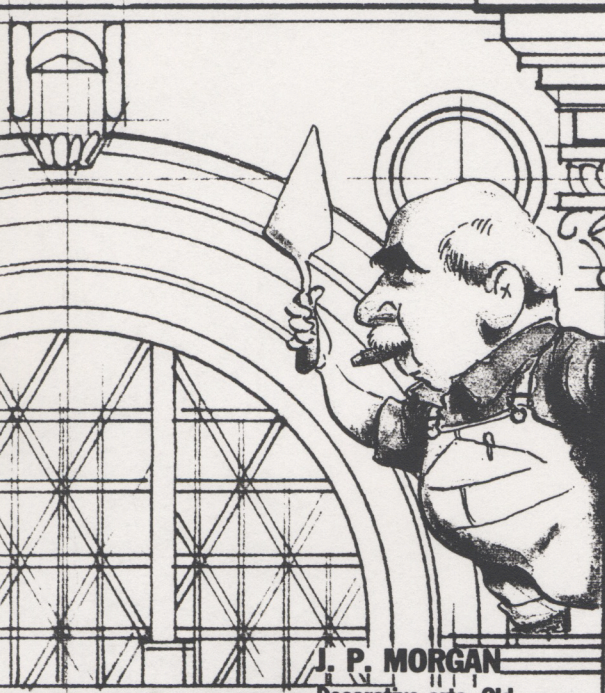
09





JAYNE (AND CHARLES) WRIGHTSMAN
18th-century French period rooms, Old Master paintings

CARROLL AND MILTON PETRIE
\$10 million—but no art—for constructing the Petrie European Sculpture Court



J. P. MORGAN
Decorative arts, Old Master paintings, medieval and Asian art

BROOKE ASTOR
The museum's greatest living donor—Astor Court and much more

WALTER ANNEBERG
One of the Met's largest acquisitions of 19th-century painting in 50 years

The maturing

It has art from 50 centuries and America's plutocrats for Museum was still in the Dark Ages. ROBERT HUGHES casts a



KLAUS PERLS
150 Benin sculptures

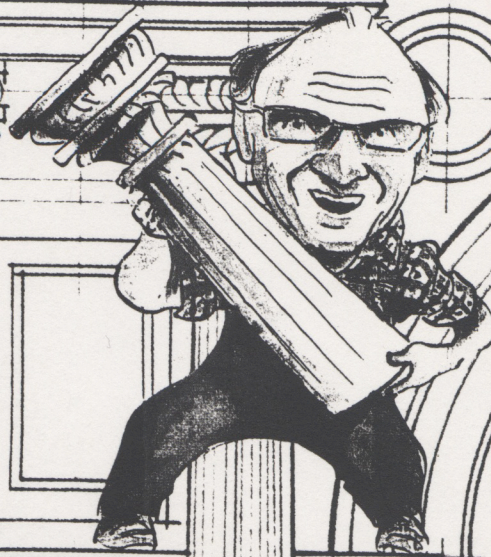


LILA ACHESON WALLACE
\$2.5 million yearly for the Great Hall, \$11 million toward the 20th Century galleries

WHO GAVE WHAT
The Met is America's ark of memory, which is why the art-fixated and monied would rather have their name above one of its galleries than anywhere else in the country. Some donated discreetly; others became obsessed with bricks and mortar.

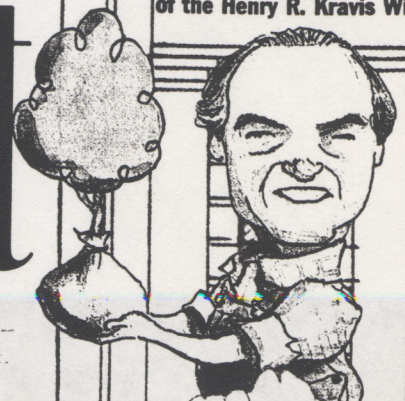


NELSON ROCKEFELLER
Art from Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas



ARTHUR SACKLER
\$2 million toward the Sackler Galleries, \$3.5 million toward the Sackler Wing

HENRY KRAVIS
\$10 million for the construction of the Henry R. Kravis Wing



of the Met

patrons. But until 1970 the Metropolitan critic's eye over the just-completed redesign

YOU HAVE come in from Fifth Avenue, through the lines of tourists and the flocks of students perched like birds in bright anoraks and T-shirts on the wide steps, past the air curtains and the guards,

into the pale, light-filled, solemnly rising gray space of the Great Hall, which the son of the architect Richard Morris Hunt adapted from his memories of Roman *thermae* to make the most august foyer in New York City

You are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and you feel lost before you start.

What do you look at now?

Not an easy question. If you walk cold into the New York Public Library, do you want to be told which of its millions of books to read first?

The Met is the biggest and densest institution of its type in the United States, the encyclopedic museum. Its trustees, its staff, and its eighth director, Philippe de Montebello, have to administer a collection drawn from fifty

centuries of the past and assembled from cultures all over the world: Asia, Africa, Oceania, America, Europe. It comprises millions of objects, from Mantegna prints to sixteen-ton black basalt sarcophagi, from carved human femurs to rococo snuffboxes, from

Cycladic dolls to Picasso's 1906 portrait of Gertrude Stein. Anything made with aesthetic intentions by anyone, anywhere, at any time, falls (at least in theory) within the purview of the Met. Because of its range, the place is bewilderingly large—it has seventeen acres of exhibition space stacked on a thirteen-acre site at the edge of Central Park—and takes many visits to know

I have visited it fifteen or twenty times a year for the last twenty years—New York art critics need to do this to rinse their eyes—and I am still not sure that I know the place *that* well; certainly there is always something in a case or on a stand that I don't remember seeing, or properly looking at, before.

surprise and keeps the eyes open.

The Met doesn't impose a strict narrative upon you, but it has categories. There are several ways of starting. From the entrance hall (the Great Hall) you can stay on the first floor and go left, or south, exploring the galleries given to antique European art—Greek, Roman, Etruscan—and so wind up in the primitive-art collections of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing before reaching the first-floor galleries given over to twentieth-century European art. Or you can go right, which takes you through the immense Egyptian collections in the north wing to the Temple of Dendur; beyond this is the recently refurbished American Wing, with its garden court based on the internal cortile of the Isabella Stewart

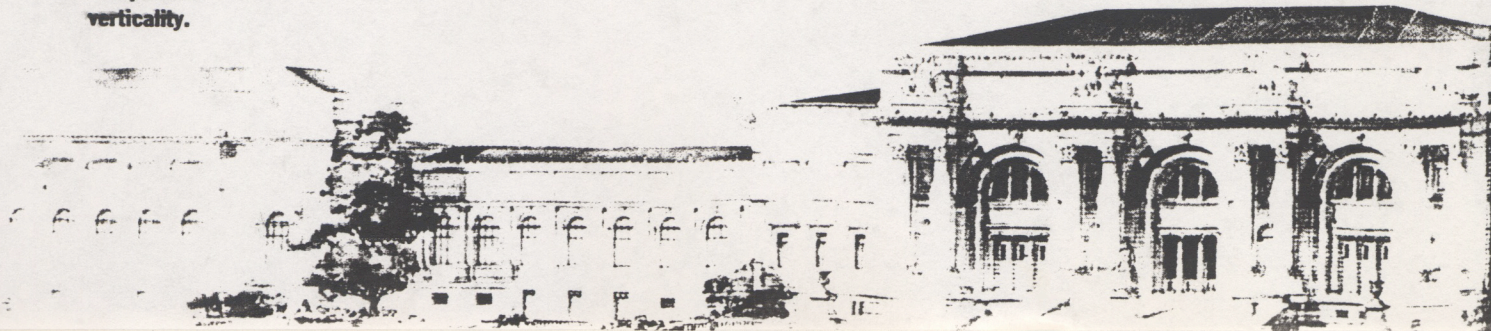
To walk up Hunt's ceremonial staircase to the painting galleries and arrive in the high, light-washed air of Tiepolo's *Triumph of Marius* is one of the most exhilarating things a museumgoer can do in America

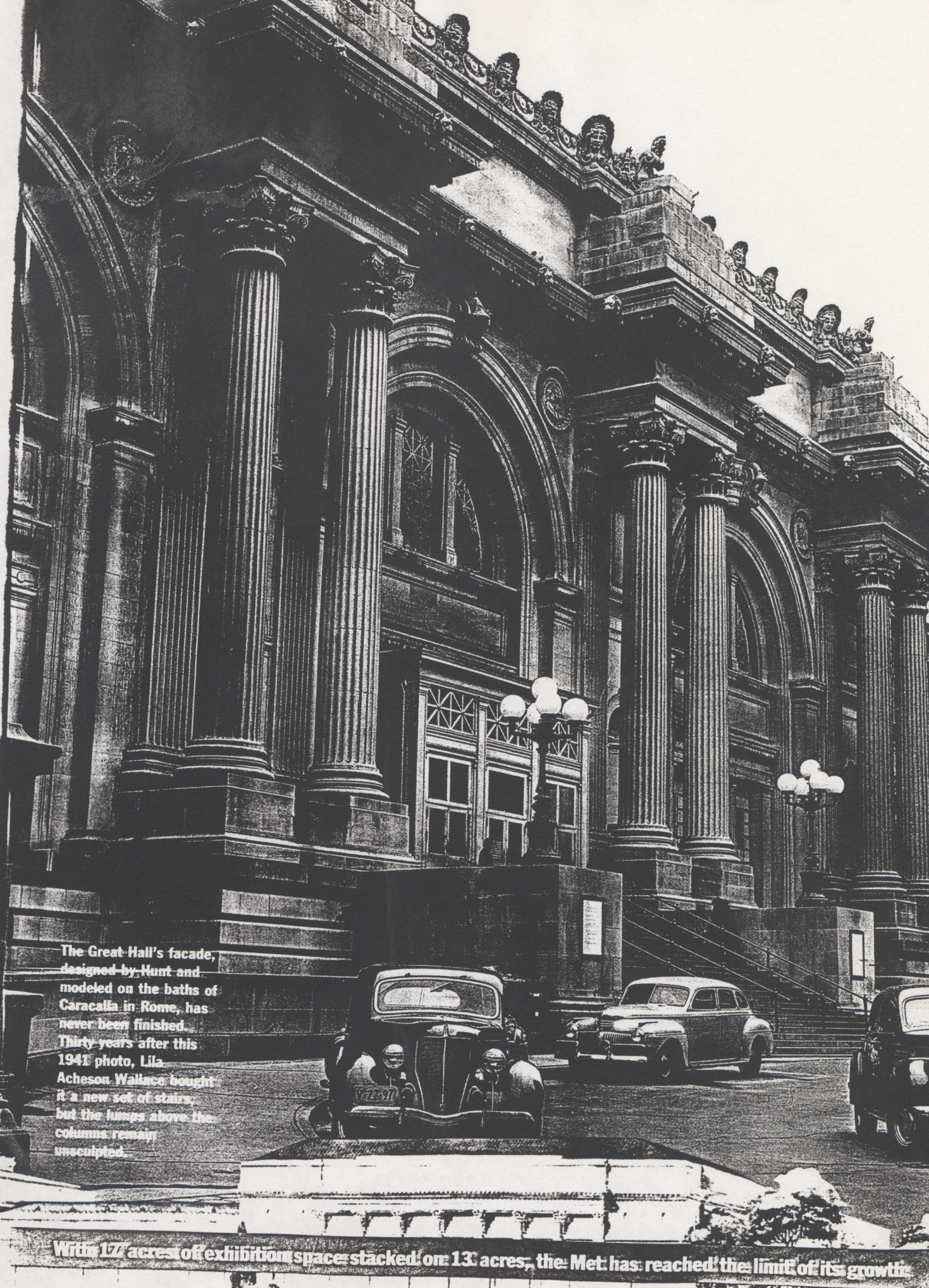
Like all great encyclopedic museums, the Met brings out the flaneur in every art lover, the instincts of the roving bee. So unless you are looking for something in particular (which the people at the octagonal information desk will direct you to), you browse. You perambulate in a state of relaxed vigilance, without a preset narrative in mind, shamelessly ready to skip whole walls but willing to spend five or ten minutes with a single object that arrests you. To the specialist and the historian, this may be reprehensibly amateurish; certainly it is unsystematic. Too bad. At least it promotes

Gardner Museum in Boston and containing an exciting collection of large-scale works by Tiffany and that greatest of American sculptors, Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

Or you can go straight ahead, west, through the mingy corridors at either side of the main staircase, through the medieval collections (those exquisite enamels and ivories, bindings and pectorals and bronze *acquamanili*, a trove equaled by no other American museum and by few in the world), toward the Robert Lehman wing. To the left of this axis lie the galleries given over to Western European arts, mainly decorative:

It would have taken a king's ransom to complete Richard Morris Hunt's megalomaniac 1880s master plan, so the trustees turned to McKim, Mead & White, whose 1904 design for the facade today stretches 900 feet along Fifth Avenue: the horizontal giant that anchors Manhattan's compulsive verticality.





The Great Hall's facade, designed by Hunt and modeled on the baths of Caracalla in Rome, has never been finished. Thirty years after this 1941 photo, Lila Acheson Wallace bought it a new set of stairs, but the humps above the columns remain unsculpted.

With 17 acres of exhibition space stacked on 13 acres, the Met has reached the limit of its growth.

Here are the splendid French period rooms donated by Charles and Jayne Wrightsman, the Meissen, Sèvres, and Capodimonte ceramics, the tapestries, the Italian bronzes, and the remarkable collection of seventeenth- through nineteenth-century monumental marble sculptures donated by Colonel C. Michael Paul and housed in a newly opened high glass-house court paid for by Milton and Carroll Petrie.

Or you can do what I usually do and go straight to the second floor. To walk up Hunt's ceremonial staircase to the painting galleries and arrive in the high, light-washed air of Tiepolo's *Tri-*

umph of Marius is one of the most exhilarating things a museumgoer can do in America. And beyond it stretch days of happy hunt-and-peck looking, a vast conspectus of the art of painting in Europe, from gold-ground trecento Sieneese panels and Flemish primitives through the works of the High Renaissance, the Rembrandt-laden room given to seventeenth-century Holland, and so on, to what must be, second to none, the outstanding collection of nineteenth-century French painting in America, housed in the 19th Century European Painting and Sculpture Galleries. Unless, of course, on reaching the second floor you have started toward the galleries given over to Chinese and Japanese ceramics, to musical instruments, or to Brooke Astor's Chinese garden court, in which case but you get the idea.

It is like other American museums in the sense that what changes or afflicts them—changes in public loyalty and political policies, flows or shortages of cash, the ups and downs of the art market—affects it, too.

big, too full, too powerful, too much gravitational mass. But it cannot be decentralized, any more than an encyclopedia can have some volumes in one library and others in another. For the last hundred years the Met has been condemned, by its nature, to pursue the illusion of a completeness that perpetually recedes. It is, in a sense, a philosophic fiction.

The prospect of spacious and stately buildings soon seemed a mirage. The

The museum's annual operating budget grew from \$9 million in 1970 to \$80 million in 1990

umphant of Marius is one of the most exhilarating things a museumgoer can do in America. And beyond it stretch days of happy hunt-and-peck looking, a vast conspectus of the art of painting in Europe, from gold-ground trecento Sieneese panels and Flemish primitives through the works of the High Renaissance, the Rembrandt-laden room given to seventeenth-century Holland, and so on, to what must be, second to none, the outstanding collection of nineteenth-century French painting in America, housed in the 19th Century European Painting and Sculpture Galleries. Unless, of course, on reaching the second floor you have started toward the galleries given over to Chinese and Japanese ceramics, to musical instruments, or to Brooke Astor's Chinese garden court, in which case but you get the idea.

It is unlike them in its size and inertia. It cannot turn on a dime. Running it is like skipping a tanker. The ship takes a long time to alter course. In New York, the capital of cultural change, the Met is the ark of memory and stability—which is why the newly rich long to be on its board, and why, other things being equal, the art-fixated plutocrat with a yen for commemoration would rather have his name above one of its galleries than anywhere else in America.

But the nameable galleries are running out, and no more can be created—a problem for fund-raisers, as we shall see. The Met has reached the limit of its growth: From now on, no more buildings can be added to the museum and not an inch of land subtracted from Central Park.

This final stage was reached through a master plan drawn up in the last years of the 1960s, announced in 1970, and built over the last two decades. The master plan gave the Met another 600,000 square feet, an area equal to the combined space of all the other art museums in Manhattan—the Guggenheim, the Whitney, the Museum of Modern Art, the Frick, the Cooper-Hewitt, The Cloisters, the museums of folk art and crafts. How well, in practice, has this immense project worked out? To approach the question, one needs to know something about the strange haphazardness of the Met's past building history

architect who drew up the Met's first master plan, in 1880, was a mediocre American disciple of John Ruskin named Calvert Vaux. He saw the museum as a grid of long galleries intersecting in octagonal rooms, around open courts, all in the Sieneese Gothic manner with striped pointy arches. Only one section was built, a large two-story wing, and when it was finished the critics dumped on it: "A cross," wrote one, "between a cotton press and a pork-packing establishment with the interior of a railroad station."

Both Vaux and his design were dropped; in 1888 and in 1894, two flanking buildings, not Gothic but Italian Mannerist in style, were added by other architects. But even as they rose, the plan that would consign them to oblivion was being drawn up. Its architect, Richard Morris Hunt, was one of the museum's trustees.

Hunt was the most celebrated American architect of his day. The word *economy* was not in his lexicon. And he set out, in those flush years of American capital, to design for New York the most grandiose museum in the world. It was to rival Gianlorenzo Bernini's never-built revamping of the Louvre for Louis XIV—a white marble palazzo covering more than eighteen acres, with vast galleries, open interior courts, and a great hall at the entrance modeled on the *thermae of Caracalla* in Rome. It would have erased Vaux's central block and its north and south wings like ants under a boot.

But only one part of it was ever built: the Great Hall—for which Hunt did no

STANDING IN ITS antonymic relation to Central Park, Culture embedded in Nature, the Met is the horizontal giant that anchors Manhattan's compulsive verticality. Among the world's art museums, only the Louvre is larger. And the Met is to the United States what the Louvre is to France: a symbol of imperium. It has been cursed for its centralization—too

THE MUSEUM WAS BORN 121 YEARS ago, on paper, through a legislative enactment by New York State—its charter

drawings beyond loose pencil sketches of its external facade. So the whole hall, one of the noblest and most consoling public spaces in America, was actually designed after the architect's death in 1895, by his son Richard Howland Hunt, who in turn was dropped by the trustees as soon as he had finished it.

Thus, by the end of the century, the Met consisted of a magnificent neoclassic vestibule tacked onto one Sieneese Gothic block and two Roman Mannerist ones. The connector was a flight of ceremonial stairs that ran straight to the second floor of Vaux's building and is the Met's main staircase today. But the younger Hunt despised Vaux's structure, and the staircase does not—in today's architectural lingo—"defer" to it: On the first floor you get to Vaux's

tures—of what, no one seems to know

New York in 1900 had quite a few plutocrats. But it had no Louis XIV, and absolute monarchy, not fund-raising trustees, would have been needed to build the rest of Hunt's megalomaniac dream of grandeur. So the trustees abandoned his master plan, and in 1904 the firm of McKim, Mead & White was asked to produce another. It had to be smaller and cheaper than Hunt's, without being an anticlimax to the Great Hall. Keeping Hunt's scheme of a symmetrical palazzo that would face Fifth Avenue but be equally accessible from Central Park, McKim, Mead & White produced the two beaux arts Renaissance-style wings north and south of Hunt's Great Hall, a facade that stretches nine hundred feet along Fifth Avenue

northwest corner of the Met an American Wing that stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb, bore no relation to the McKim, Mead & White design, and made further symmetry impossible. The thumb then sprouted a wart, the Van Rensselaer period room.

Throughout the 1930s the Met's layout descended into jumble. From the park it looked like an unfinished mess, a construction site; within, it was a maze. Not until the early 1940s did a new director, Francis Henry Taylor, come up with a master plan that concentrated on the uses, rather than the monumental aspect, of the museum—the libraries, archives, storage, and office space—and on the broad historical narrative of the exhibition space. Taylor was the first director to think of sorting the Met's ever-

In the 1980s it was no longer enough for collectors to leave their art to be absorbed into the local museum. New money had to have its own wing. If it did not get it, it walked—and set up its own museum



See page B7 of the pullout guide for where to find this 1906 portrait of Gertrude Stein. Other important works by Picasso—from the recently acquired Annenberg Collection—are on display in temporary galleries through October.

hall (which now contains the Gothic sculpture and the choir screen from Valladolid, the world's masterpiece of sixteenth-century iron-forging) by means of two measly corridors on either side of the staircase, a gesture of contempt if ever there was one.

Richard Morris Hunt's massive facade was never quite finished. If you look up from the entrance steps, you will see above each of the four pairs of columns that define the three bays of the Great Hall an oddly rugged bulk of stone, laid in courses. These lumps were to be giant allegorical sculp-

today, from 80th to 84th streets.

For the next quarter century the Met's trustees stuck, more or less faithfully, to McKim, Mead & White's master plan. Its galleries, the last of which opened in 1926, contain the J. P. Morgan collection of decorative arts as well as the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman collections. Space was later created for a whole Renaissance marble courtyard from the castle at Vélez Blanco in Andalusia, which had been sold by an impoverished noble in 1904 and later bought in Paris by a New York financier named George Blumenthal and transported in crates to New York. The Blumenthal Patio affirmed the undesirable precedent of putting whole buildings inside the museum.

But in 1924 the plan came unstuck. The trustees allowed the president, Robert de Forest, to tack onto the

growing collection into a pattern of sub-museums: the Ancient East in the north wing, Europe in the south, and decorative arts (with America) in the west. He also hoped to include the Whitney Museum of American Art—which had no permanent home at that time—in the Met's fabric, but this fell through when the Whitney trustees decided to build their own museum.

Museum money was short in the war years, and so Taylor's plan lapsed like the ones before it. The Met (architecturally speaking) came waddling through the 1940s, the 1950s, and most of the 1960s—a disordered palimpsest bulging at the seams. There was little that Taylor's successor, James Rorimer, could do to rationalize it. It was a maze of bizarre transitions in which the visitor wandered piteously, imploring (*Continued on page 178*)

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Met Museum

(Continued from page 153) directions from the guards. Compared with this, the old museums of Europe—the Uffizi, the Prado, London's National Gallery, even the Louvre—were models of clarity. Moreover, the building had no relation to the park, on which it had turned its back; the only public access was from Fifth Avenue. Its storerooms were crowded, its offices dark and poky, its curatorial functions badly cluttered; and there was no proper climate control.

By the mid-1960s the museum was a victim of its own success. The boom years of American museumgoing had begun and America's greatest museum was not ready for them. The Metropolitan had not created a single square foot of new exhibition space in forty years, though in that time its annual attendance had grown to 2.5 million.

BUT IN 1967 A NEW DIRECTOR, the thirty-six-year-old Thomas P. F. Hoving—the middle initials, he used to joke, stood for "Publicity Forever"—took charge; and a new and final master plan was soon thrust right to the top of the museum's agenda. Developed by the architects Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, it received the imprimatur of the trustees in 1970, in time for the Met's centenary.

This ultimate enlargement of the Met was Hoving's achievement. No one can take it away from him, and no one who remembers the pre-1970 Met can fail, on balance, to be grateful for it. Hoving was the most difficult director the Met, or perhaps any New York museum, ever had. He was abrasive, cocksure, and a motor-mouth. His relations with his staff were frequently terrible and drove some gifted people away. He was criticized for overmerchandising the museum. Being the son of Walter Hoving, of Tiffany's, he expanded the Met's old postcard-and-replica shop into a veritable department store filled with mechanical clones of the Met's smaller and more popular objects, a process that he defended as "democratization." His deaccessioning procedures—the imprudent selling off of works of art—embroiled the Met in unwelcome clouds of scandal in the early 1970s, as did some of his more extravagant purchases, such as the million-dollar (and almost certainly hot) Euphronios krater in 1972.

Hoving liked to boast that he was the last of the "Grand Acquisitors"; that after him and his plan, the Met could only refine its collection, not expand it. This was not true; despite crimps in the cash flow, the Met under De Montebello, Hoving's successor, has continued to acquire some

remarkable things, such as its new Delacroix, *Les Natchez*, or the 150 Benin sculptures given by the dealer Klaus Perls early in 1991. But there has certainly been a slowdown. At one time the Met published an annual brochure, "Notable Acquisitions." Five years ago the word *Notable* was quietly exchanged for *Recent*. With a buying budget of only \$2.5 million last year—exclusive of gifts—the museum could no longer compete in the hysterically inflated market. This market also sucked away artworks that had hung in the Met and were expected to stay there, such as the Van Gogh *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, which was sold to a Japanese industrialist for \$82.5 million at Christie's just before the market crashed in 1990.

Nevertheless, in terms of building, the fact remains that without Hoving's drive and determination the Met could not have crystallized; it would have muddled into the 1980s without deciding its form.

The Met's 1870 charter stressed its aim "of furnishing popular instruction and recreation." The last two words were dropped in 1908 as incompatible with the therapeutic, educational dignity of a great American museum. "Recreation" was something you got in Central Park. Hoving reinstated it, at least in spirit. He did so through an ideology of spectacle: big temporary exhibitions—during his directorship the word *blockbuster* entered museum language—and big permanent installations, the whole masterpiece-and-treasure syndrome.

The first of the master plan's key installations was a wing for the primitive art donated by Nelson Rockefeller in memory of his son Michael, who had perhaps been drowned or eaten by headhunters (well, let's be politically correct: incorporated into traditional Melanesian dietary patterns) in New Guinea in 1961. The second was the Robert Lehman Collection of European painting and sculpture. The third was an Egyptian temple. Space had to be created for all three.

But this was not all. Roche and Dinke-
loo's plan gave the whole museum a face-
lift, starting with a new entrance on Fifth
Avenue—enlarged steps with handrails, a
plaza that ran almost the whole length of
the facade, with driveways looping be-
hind fountains, air-curtain doors, and a
complete refurbishment of the Great Hall.
After decades of neglect and clutter, it re-
emerged in the 1970s with its three soar-
ing domes cleaned—the grandest foyer in
America, thanks to a \$2.5 million annual
endowment from Lila Acheson Wallace.

The Met's collection of nineteenth-centu-

ry painting and sculpture, which includes
the finest conspectus of Impressionism in
any American museum, needed rearrange-
ment in what would become the André
Meyer Galleries. There had to be space for
twentieth-century and contemporary art,
and more space for the immense Egyptian
collection, of which only the barest sam-
pling could be shown in the old galleries.
The American Wing needed redoing. And
so on, seemingly ad infinitum.

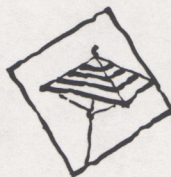
THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE THREE
big acquisitions was the collection formed

by the financier Robert Lehman around a
core purchased by his father, Philip, the
founder of Lehman Brothers. It comprised
numerous fourteenth- and fifteenth-centu-
ry Italian paintings, exceptional bronzes
and ceramics, and more than sixteen hun-
dred Old Master drawings of very high
quality. Among its highlights are Gio-
vanni di Paolo's *Creation of the World*
and the *Expulsion from Paradise*, one of
the supreme images of the Sieneese quat-
trocento, along with El Greco's magisterial
St. Jerome as a Cardinal and Ingres's
Portrait of the Princesse de Broglie. It

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Met Museum

was, incontestably, one of the great American private collections. Much of it had been bought with the advice and eager scholarly backup of the Met's curators, on the assumption that it would one day wind up in the museum.

Lehman died in 1969, having set up a foundation that owned the collection. Hoving had to negotiate with the Lehman Foundation, and it outmaneuvered him. He went in expecting the foundation to build the Lehman wing, and he lost; the Met had to pay every cent for its construction.

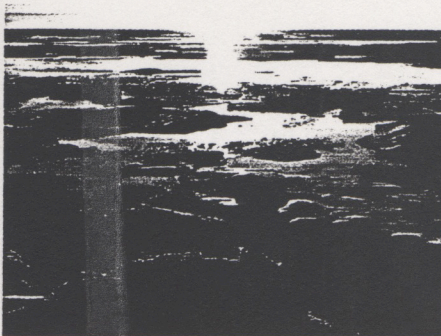
Lehman wanted a monument. He would not let his precious objects be absorbed into the Met's collection, where some of the lesser ones might sink from view or, the final indignity, be sold. They must remain separate and distinct, in their own wing, with their own curator appointed by the Lehman Foundation, nothing subtracted, nothing added, forever and ever, amen. What was more, Lehman wanted his collection displayed in period rooms copied from his town house on West 54th Street. These period rooms did not bear the slightest affinity to others in the museum, such as the exquisite paneled and furnished eighteenth-century French interiors, which the

Wrightsmans gave to the Met during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. They were only ten years old, having been done in 1959 by a Parisian decorator. So there is an odd incongruity between the soaring central space of his pyramid and the stodgy velvet-hung quarters (politely known as "intimate spaces"), deprived of visual "air" and natural light, in which his art is shown. The Lehman wing has the same defect as another highly touted museum building of the period, the East Wing of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., by I. M. Pei. In both cases you have a large "ceremonial" core flooded with natural daylight, which is wasted because there is no art to see, and galleries shoved off to the sides, which depend entirely on artificial light. Looking down into its court, below the apex of the pyramid, one half-wants to see a porphyry sarcophagus with Lehman in it.

The Lehman wing, completed by 1975, is certainly an asset to the Met—particularly since its courtside galleries are now used for temporary exhibitions, such as the unforgettable *Painting in Renaissance Siena*, mounted by Keith Christiansen in 1988 as a seventy-fifth birthday homage to his maestro, Sir John Pope-Hennessy

But the fallout from it has been a nuisance for other American museums, since it spawned a whole brood of wannabes. In the 1980s, it was no longer enough for collectors to leave their acquisitions to be absorbed into the local museum. New money had to have its own wing. If it did not get it, it walked—and set up its own museum. Hence the rise of vanity museums with quite minor collections, from the Terra Museum of American Art in Chicago to the culminating farce of the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in Los Angeles, a million-dollar shell with (maybe) six first-rate paintings in it.

And there was another problem as well. Hoving's habit of selling works of art the Met had been left, in order to raise acquisition funds—all American museums do this, but not with the abandon with which the Met did it in the early 1970s—made donors leery. Mindful of Adelaide Milton de Groot, from whose bequest the Met sold no fewer than thirty paintings, some of real value, donors began to beef up restrictions. The most extreme were those imposed by Jack and Belle Linsky, whose collection of European paintings and decorative arts the Met greatly coveted.



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THE ROCKEFELLER WING, COMPLETED in 1982, holds primitive art: a high, magniloquent glass shed displaying items from the collection of 7,500 tribal objects from Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas assembled by the former governor or collected by his son Michael in New Guinea. The most spectacular of these are the twenty-foot-high *mbis* (ancestor images) poles from the Sepik District, but the wing holds every imaginable size of object, down to tiny pre-Columbian jade earflares. Some items—such as the wooden Senufo birds—are among the most compelling things in the whole museum. The place is overinstalled, an example of the design mania that swept the Met in the 1970s and 1980s. The lighting tends so far toward the theatrical that some vitrines in the wing appear to be modeled on Trader Vic's. The public seems to like it that way.

The southwest first-floor corner of the Met, beyond the Rockefeller wing, was reserved for galleries of twentieth-century art. This space was nearly the site of a mistake that would have permanently skewed the nature of the Met and its educational mission.

In 1977 the museum's trustee Walter Anenberg, former ambassador to Britain and head of Triangle Publications—which pub-

lishes *TV Guide*, among other things—announced that he was going to give the Met \$40 million to build and maintain something called the Fine Arts Center of the Annenberg School of Communications, to be run by none other than Thomas Hoving. Impressed by Kenneth Clark's TV series *Civilisation*, Annenberg thought the Met should start putting the world's cultures on film, tape, and videodisc.

Luckily, this fell through. Annenberg's gift would have been one of the largest in the Met's history. But the idea of turning over the museum's limited space to making films about art was intrinsically bad, since it is, above all, the job of museums to show the real thing rather than to make videos of it: There is a legitimate role for films on art (well, after *The Shock of the New*, I would say so, wouldn't I?), but all museum experience, as distinct from media experience, starts and ends with the concrete presence of the unique object. The Met's curatorial staff winced at the project as a ghastly cuckoo in their nest. Infuriated by outside criticism and by the resistance of some members of the Manhattan Borough Board, whose approval was necessary, Annenberg canceled the

gift in March 1978, only four months after he had unveiled it. But thirteen years later, as we shall see, he would come back with a much better one.

At the time, with city budgets shrinking and no new zillionaires on the horizon, it looked as though the southwest corner of the Met's master plan would never be completed and that twentieth-century art would find no new home there. But *Reader's Digest* rode to the rescue: Having paid for the Great Hall, Lila Acheson Wallace helped fund the 20th Century galleries.

Some critics still think the Met should not have gone into the twentieth century: Why compete with the Museum of Modern Art, whose collection can never be rivaled? But "classic" modernism, the art of Europe and America between 1880 and 1960, is by now almost as closed a historic period as the Renaissance. There is a strong case for presenting it in a continuum with the remoter past, which MoMA cannot do and the Met can. No museum in America offers greater opportunities for cross-cultural, cross-period comparison than the Met. If you want to see the kinds of African masks that inspired Braque and Picasso in their early Cubist years, for in-

stance, you can go straight to the Rockefeller wing without changing museums. The real trouble is the difficulty in getting major Cubist paintings. By and large, the Met missed the modernist boat. In the golden years of 1895–1925, when the greatest works of the nineteenth century were still (relatively) cheap and available, donors such as Louisine Havemeyer were buying avidly, and the triumphantly successful result is inscribed on the walls of the Met's French realist and, above all, its Impressionist collections, from Courbet to Degas. This did not happen with French art after 1900—Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, and onward—or with twentieth-century American art, which the Met virtually ignored until the 1960s. By then it was getting too late to put together a collection that rivaled, either in scope or quality, its holdings of earlier painting and sculpture. Which is not to say that the Met does not have some outstanding modernist paintings—it does. Its wily and well-connected curator of twentieth-century art, William Lieberman, has enticed collections away from MoMA and to the Met; most recently, it received a group of ninety Paul Klees as a gift from Heinz Berg-



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gruen, who is almost the last of the great twentieth-century connoisseur-dealers, and secured the remarkable modern collection assembled by the film producer Jacques Gelman and his wife, Natasha, in Mexico City.

THE DISASTER AREA OF HOVING'S plan is on the north side of the building: the glass hangar containing the Temple of Dendur. This small structure stood on the banks of the Nile, some fifty miles south of Aswan, around 15 B.C. Having been built so late, well after the Roman conquest of Egypt and the collapse of the Ptolemies, it is of scant historical interest; and as architecture it is negligible.

In 1963 the Egyptian government dismantled the temple, stone by stone—642 in all—and moved it from the site to save it from being drowned by the new Aswan High Dam, that vast hydraulic project whose side effects have since turned out so badly for the monuments of the Nile Valley.

The Egyptians then gave it to the U.S. government as a thank-you present for its \$16 million contribution to the saving of Abu Simbel and other ancient Nubian

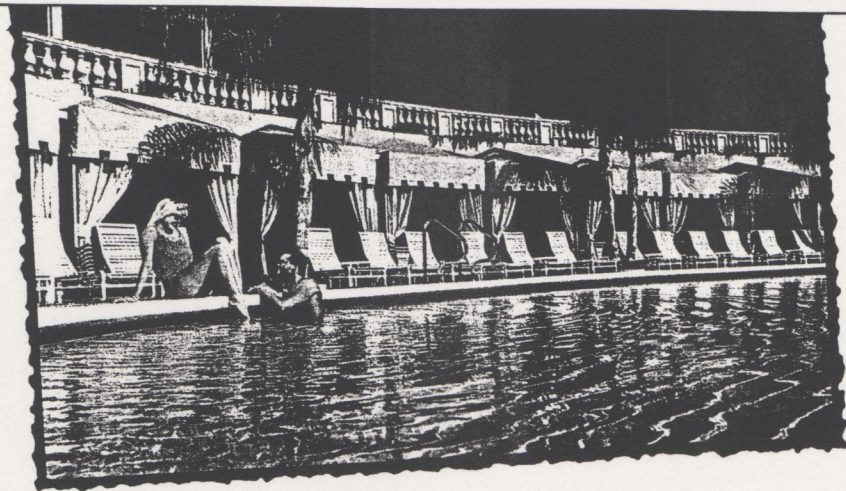
monuments, which were also threatened by the dam. Lyndon Johnson now had to find a museum that would take Dendur. The first choice was the Smithsonian Institution, which balked at the cost of constructing a building to protect Dendur from the inclemency of Washington's weather—left in the open, its soft sandstone would have dissolved like a sugar cube in the rain. So the president, hell-bent to keep the Egyptians happy by showcasing Dendur in a major museum, started thumping loudly on the roof of the Metropolitan, and Thomas Hoving saw—or thought he saw—its gee-whiz possibilities: It may not have been much of an Egyptian temple in Egypt, but at least it was the only Egyptian temple in New York. (The Met's other Egyptian building, the Mastaba of Pernebi just north of the Great Hall, is a tomb, not a temple.)

So Dendur was accepted. The Met budgeted a whacking \$8.6 million (including \$1.4 million from New York City and a \$3.5 million gift from the Sackler family) for its installation in a glass case on the first floor abutting the park, above a subterranean parking garage. This shell, designed by Roche and Dinkeloo, is 220 feet

long (almost three times the length of the temple itself) and 130 feet wide—28,600 square feet, an absurdly inflated setting for this archaeological rhinestone, foolishly expensive to cool in summer and heat in winter. It is also a waste of the northern daylight that paintings need: By contrast, the twentieth-century art has to suffer the deadening effect of artificial light in its low-ceilinged, dully corporate galleries. Dendur is pure loss to the Met, except as a catering hall. Large official dinners and fund-raisers are held there. But to the museum *as museum*—one whose Egyptian collection is incomparably the largest and best in America—it is a mere stage set, an irrelevance. "Put the damn thing in the park," growls a curator "It had graffiti all over it when it was in Egypt, anyway."

THE STYLE OF MUSEUM PATRONAGE changed dramatically in the 1980s. The decade afflicted the Met with an image problem. To Hoving's policy of pervasive spectacle was now added—to a degree hardly imaginable ten years before and not, perhaps, seen in America for a century—an ideology of vain and obtrusive consumption. Needing money, the Met took to hiring out its space for Trimalchian bashes, private and corporate. The apogee of gross display was reached in 1988, with the Steinberg-Tisch wedding reception, when nearly \$1 million was spent on flowers alone. Although it is true that the Met is a privately owned institution, it offended the general public by turning itself after hours into a glorious-food spa for Manhattan's junk-bond oligarchy. One did not need to be either a snob or a socialist to resent this.

Moreover, there was a time—well within living memory but institutionally a nearly lost age—when wealthy New Yorkers, from Irwin Untermyer to Brooke Astor or Charles and Jayne Wrightsman, would give either anonymously or without excessive fanfare to "their" museum: one's name on the wall label, a tax deduction, a dinner, a warm glow of justified satisfaction, and—*hasta!* The works of art they gave were absorbed into the Met's general collection, but one still notes and remembers who gave them: The Wrightsman gifts, apart from the French period rooms, include the Georges de La Tour *Penitent Magdalen*, the Vermeer *Portrait of a Young Woman*, David's portrait of the Lavoisiers—which is arguably the finest eighteenth-century French portrait in America—and Lorenzo Lotto's enchanting *Venus with her atten-*



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dant Cupid peeing, as a sign of fecundity, through a wreath.

But the effect of the master plan was to fixate new donors on bricks and mortar. The Met had to go after money, not collections—and few of the new plutocrats of the 1980s had collected much that the museum wanted to get. Nobody was going to remember them for their art. And they did not want to put their money where it would go unseen—into the operating expenses of the museum, for instance, where it could pay for such unglamorous but essential things as catalog work or guards' uniforms. A donor who will do that—and a few, luckily for the museum, still do—is beyond praise. But no: The new ones must be remembered by their names, raised in large bronze letters over courts, wings, and galleries, even as the name of Donald Trump was inscribed on his tower.

In the past, the Met was sometimes manipulated by donors with an eye on an inscription. You would not suppose, looking at the Sackler Galleries, that the actual donation of the Sackler family was well under \$2 million, but so it was—a wretchedly parsimonious return, considering all

the museum had to do over the years in the way of free storage and care of the works of art that the Sacklers still owned and later sold. Since then, the museum has had to get very serious about selling plaques. But since its space is now fixed by the completion of the master plan, the number of plaques could not be much increased. Therefore, the commemorative space had to shrink. The recently opened Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court, for instance, is very big—a glass-roofed arcade running almost half the depth of the building and looking (with its trelliswork and absurd parterre beds of forced tulips) both high tech and vulgar, not unlike the interior of some new platinum-card hotel in Dallas. But its neighbor, the Henry R. Kravis Wing, is less a wing than a large corridor linking the southwest galleries to the Petrie court. The corporate raider was asked, in the mid-1980s, to give \$10 million to the Met for a wing with his name on it. Kravis did not produce the money in one lump sum. It came in spaced payments, as is often the case, and after inflation it proved insufficient, so the space remains incomplete. It houses mainly eighteenth-century terra-cotta and bronze sculpture by Houdon,

Clodion, and others, and its centerpiece is a large *modello* by Clodion celebrating the first flight of the Montgolfiers' fire balloon, which rose from a field in Annonay in 1783. The curator who put it there deserves a bouquet. How exquisitely fitting that Kravis should be commemorated by a sculpture made in praise of ascent and hot air!

The Met is still casting about for money to finish the wing—not an easy task, since Kravis's name is already on it in bronze letters. However, the museum has now been presented with a solution to a more urgent and nagging display problem: how to show its magnificent collection of nineteenth-century French painting, whose core was the group of works by Degas, Manet, Monet, and others bequeathed to the Met in 1929 by the New York collector Louisine Havemeyer. In recent years it has been housed in the André Meyer Galleries (now the 19th Century European Painting and Sculpture Galleries), adjacent to the gallery on the second floor where the museum's collection of Rodins—most the gift of Gerald Cantor—and paintings by such non-Impressionist nineteenth-century French artists as Gustave Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes are displayed. Meyer, the former head of Lazard Frères, did not have much in the way of a collection, but he gave quite a lot of money to the Met, including the cash to finish the Rockefeller wing (late in life, plagued by his political-campaign expenses, Nelson Rockefeller was not as rich as his name suggested), and so the Met named its Impressionist and Postimpressionist galleries after him. As an exhibition space, they have been a flop from the start, with their incoherent arrangement of angled screen walls that look temporary but are in fact fixed and allow no clear aedicular display of groups of paintings and sculpture. Apart from the merit of having some natural daylight through the roof—for most nineteenth-century painting, especially Impressionism, was conceived in terms of daylight and tends to suffer under artificial lighting—the 19th Century European Painting and Sculpture Galleries are unworthy of the collections they hold. Their redesign, however, will cost millions.

BUT THEN IN MARCH 1991 THE long-hoped-for angel appeared, in the form of Walter Annenberg, who announced that he was bequeathing his collection of more than fifty Impressionist and Postimpressionist paintings to the Met, including major works by Manet, Degas, Monet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lau-

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trec, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, Gauguin, Matisse, Picasso, and Braque. At the loony height of the art market in early 1990, Annenberg had turned down an offer of \$1 billion for these paintings from a Japanese syndicate. They meshed very well with the collections the Met had built up from earlier gifts of donors—not only the Havemeyer Collection but the bequests of Stephen Clark, Sam Lewisohn, and Robert Lehman, too. For instance, the Met was already well supplied with Monets of the 1860s and 1880s but poor in 1870s Monets, of which Annenberg had three. Annenberg's 1888 Renoir family portrait of the daughters of Catulle Mendès complements the Met's own Renoir group, *Madame Charpentier and her Children* (1878).

THE NEWS OF THE BEQUEST brought some heartburn to other U.S. museums, through which the Annenberg Collection had been touring in 1990-91; all of them had vied to produce the most sumptuous catalogs and elaborate launch parties in the hope of getting a permanent claim on the goods. The contenders were the Philadelphia Museum of Art

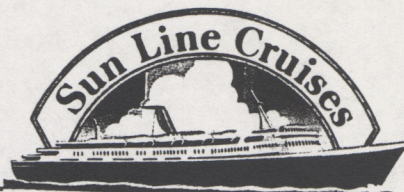
(Philly is Annenberg's hometown), the National Gallery in Washington, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. But it was the Met that won, because, as Annenberg put it, "I happen to believe in strength going to strength. There are, in my opinion, only two great and complete museums in the world which cover virtually all the arts—the Met and the Louvre." (The Los Angeles County Museum of Art got a consolation prize from Annenberg: \$10 million in cash.)

The bequest was, in fact, the result of a long diplomatic siege laid to Annenberg in Palm Springs and New York City by the Met's director, Philippe de Montebello, and its president, William Luers. First they had to smooth the plumage still ruffled by the collapse of the media center more than a decade before; then they had to convince the plutocrat, now in his eighties and well aware of how much other museums wanted his collection, that the Met could offer the best deal. Luckily for the museum, Annenberg did not insist on the kind of terms that Lehman had imposed on the less experienced Hoving. None of the paintings can be sold, of course. Nor can any be loaned outside the

museum, though "they can take one of my paintings and include it in a show at the Metropolitan." Annenberg wanted his pictures "to stay together as a family unit," and the Met spent a great deal of time figuring out how this could be done to the advantage of its existing nineteenth-century collection. Months before Annenberg decided on the bequest, De Montebello and Luers showed him a model the size of a Ping-Pong table of the nineteenth-century galleries, redesigned to hold his pictures. Its core was an elliptical rotunda built to house the Met's Manets; flanking it were two groups of nine galleries each—on one side were the Annenberg paintings, with works from the collection that related to them; on the other, more galleries named for Meyer and Havemeyer. In this way, as De Montebello later put it, "We will hang his Cézannes, Gauguins, and Van Goghs in one of the Annenberg rooms so that in the adjoining galleries you will see our Cézannes, Gauguins, and Van Goghs." It was an elegantly processional scheme, far more rational than the present clutter of angled screens. The model—a sprat to catch a mackerel—worked, and Annenberg bought

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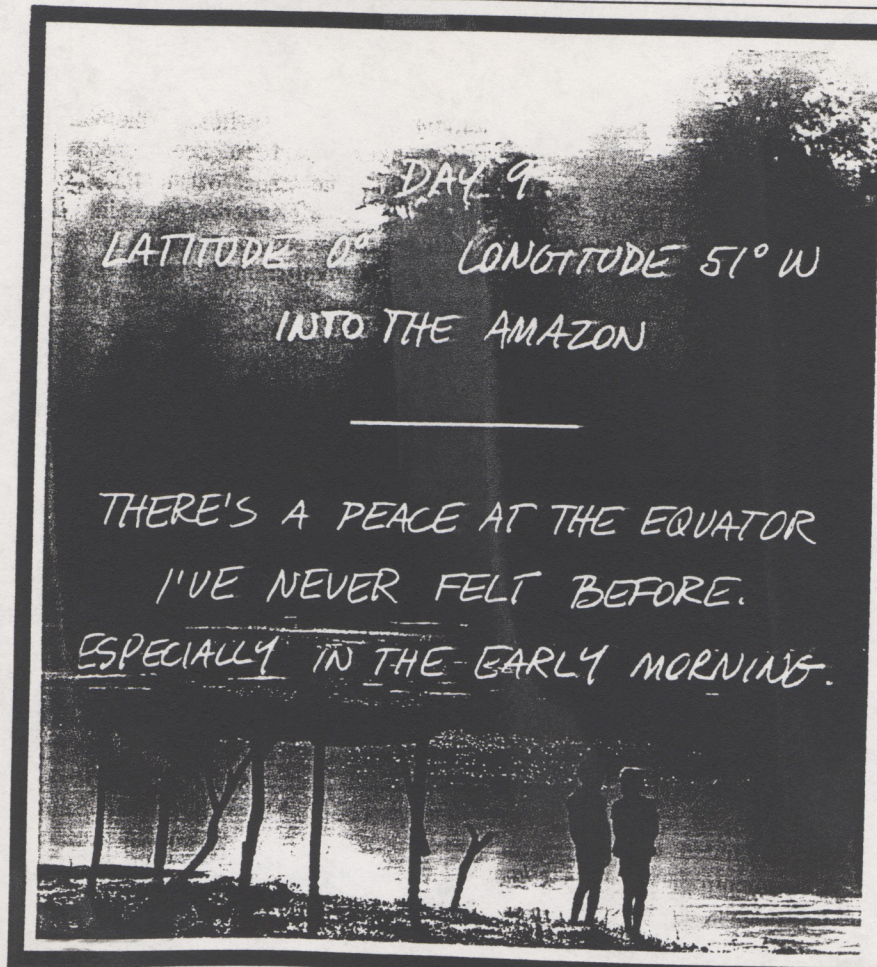


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the idea, thus assuring the Met its largest block acquisition in the field of nineteenth-century painting in fifty years.

One would not bet that these new galleries represent the last big reshuffling of space that the Met will do. Someday, it may have to move its restaurant to the roof in order to free the large area it now occupies on the first floor for its proper purpose of displaying art; and perhaps some ruthlessly brave combination of director and board, in years to come, will find the means and the will to get rid of the Temple of Dendur, demolish and rebuild its wing, and thus win back the vast exhibition space of which it deprives the museum. Still, for the moment, the Met seems to have reached the limit of its expansion—just at the time when there are no more gifts comparable to Annenberg's in the offing and no more collections of equal magnitude being formed.

In any case, there will be difficult budgetary times ahead, now that New York City, floundering in its grim economic morass, has had to slash \$24 million—twenty-eight percent—from the Department of Cultural Affairs' 1991 budget of \$87 million. This entailed chopping its largest subvention, \$9.7 million to the Met, by more than a third. This reduction (to \$6.2 million) will not have the same drastic effect on the museum's ability to operate that it threatens to produce in other institutions, such as the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Botanical Garden, or the Brooklyn Academy of Music. But it is a bad omen all the same.

Twenty years ago, the Met plunged into its master plan on the assumption (which seemed realistic at the time) that nothing would ever constrict the flow of cash from public budgets and private generosity, each stimulating the other to give, give, give. The Met was the natural home of surplus, but now deficit reigns, and the sense of social crisis in New York is so acute that corporations are more likely to direct their public relations dollars to what they call "human services" than to cultural underwriting. It will be a long time before any American cultural institution can imagine an expansion like the Met's master plan. The time of such plans has gone; we will see them in booming Europe, with its state-funded cultural institutions, but not in entropic America. Count yourself lucky, then, as you fork out your dollars for the day's colored tin button at the Met's entrance, that it was undertaken at all. □

Jerusalem

(Continued from page 119) at the gate, I wanted to ask if this was the same al-Husseini whose father had been killed leading the Palestinian forces in the 1948 War of Independence, but before I could speak a woman opened the door of the house and asked us in.

Her husband was away in London, Najat al-Husseini explained, but would we like to come in anyway? The invitation was guarded, since the woman had no idea who I was, and the house, I sensed, was more a headquarters than a normal dwelling. Faisal al-Husseini is a leader of the West Bank Palestinians and a member of an important Jerusalem family. He heads the delegation of Palestinian moderates whom Secretary of State James Baker has consulted on his visits to the Israeli capital. Presumably the al-Husseini who built what is now the American Colony Hotel was part of the same family, and so was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, also named al-Husseini, a fanatical anti-Zionist who in the 1930s had collaborated with the Nazis to prevent further Jewish emigration to Palestine.

MY REASON FOR WONDERING about Faisal al-Husseini's father was the result of a bizarre coincidence. I had dined the previous night in West Jerusalem with an Israeli friend who had fought as a young officer in the War of Independence and had been responsible for killing the leader of the Palestinian forces, Abd al Kader al-Husseini. The battle had taken place at Kastel Hill, astride the road from Tel Aviv, and my friend's heroic attack—he was the only surviving officer in his unit—made it possible for a Jewish column to relieve the besieged Israeli forces fighting in Jerusalem. Abd al Kader was an important figure, and his tomb now stands on the Temple Mount beside the Dome of the Rock, an immense honor. As soon as I entered the sparsely furnished sitting room of Faisal al-Husseini's home, I saw on the otherwise bare walls two portraits of the slain Palestinian general in full uniform.

Now it was Najat al-Husseini who seemed besieged as we sipped our coffee, accompanied by a bodyguard who plained that Faisal was working toward negotiated settlement under American auspices. But he was caught between the intransigent Israeli government and the angry young Palestinians who had come of age during the *intifada* and who are embittered by the failure, so far, of their uprising and by the defeat of Saddam Hussein, whose promise to make up for this