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“What We Are Fighting For” How World War II Changed the Relationship Between U.S. Art Museums and the Federal Government

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**“What We Are Fighting For”**

**How World War II Changed the Relationship**

**Between U.S. Art Museums and the Federal Government**

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in History

by

Kathleen Berrin

Dissertation Committee:

Associate Professor Laura J. Mitchell, Co-Chair

Assistant Professor Allison Perlman, Co-Chair

Associate Professor, Bridget R. Cooks

2018



## DEDICATION

To the following mostly unsung directors of art museums  
who persisted in creating pioneering exhibitions before and  
during World War II:

Alfred Barr, Jr.  
Lesley Cheek  
John Cotton Dana  
Carlos Emmons Cummings  
René d' Harnoncourt  
David Finley  
Juliana Force  
Blake-More Godwin  
Walter Heil  
Grace McCann Morley  
Daniel Catton Rich  
Theodore Sizer  
Francis Henry Taylor  
Herbert Eustis Winlock

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DISSERTATION

AAM	American Association of Museums
AAMD	American Association of Museum Directors
AFA	American Federation of Arts
ASTP	Army Specialized Training Program
CAA	College Art Association
CCF	Congress for Cultural Freedom
CCCR	Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FAP	Federal Arts Program during WPA
ICOM	International Council of Museums
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art, New York
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
NGA	National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
NRPB	National Resources Planning Board
OAS	Organization of American States
OCIAA	Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs
OMGUS	Office of the Military Government United States, in Germany
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
OWI	Office of War Information

PWAP	Public Works Art Project
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces
SITES	Smithsonian Institute Traveling Exhibition Service
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN	United Nations
USO	United Service Organizations
WAC	War Advertising Council
WPA	Works Progress Administration

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After devoting nearly forty years as Curator of Africa, Oceania, and the America (AOA) and at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, I wanted to investigate how high-visibility cultural art exhibitions developed and how such projects served national needs. What relationship did these exhibitions have to nationalism? Why did directors accept the inevitable stresses and strains that creating them entailed, and why did institutions continue to do such resource-intensive projects?

I applied for and was accepted into the Ph.D. program in History at the University of California Irvine. The department was small and supportive with innovative scholars who were dedicated teachers and mentors. I couldn't have asked for a better place to develop my skills as a cultural historian. Laura Mitchell and Allison Perlman blessedly became my dissertation co-advisors; Bridget Cooks provided valuable constructive criticism.

Looking back, I am grateful to many former colleagues, particularly administrative and exhibitions people and other technical support staff at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco from whom I learned so much through the years. Thomas K. Seligman, Deputy Director for Exhibitions at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, was an early mentor. Amazing scholars, colleagues, and guest-curators who collaborated with our museum on high-visibility AOA projects include Esther Pasztory, Mary Miller, Susan Vogel, Herbert Cole, and Elizabeth Benson. I owe a special debt to Bertha Cea Echenique, former Senior Cultural Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, who helped me survive many complicated exhibition projects with her government and understand the crucial role of exhibition diplomacy. Collaborations with the staff at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. provided other valuable insights.

The archives at MoMA, NGA, and the Met were critical to my research. Other museum archives of considerable help to this dissertation were at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Brooklyn Museum, Harvard Art Museums, Toledo Museum of Art, and Walker Art Center. Research at the National Archives and Records Administration and the Library of Congress was essential. The Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York, provided a Grant-In-Aid to support my work on Nelson Rockefeller during the summer of 2016 that inspired Chapter Four of this dissertation.

My husband, Al Berrin, and my children Susan Horn, Sebastian Rilen, and Samuel Berrin were always in the wings cheering, as were their spouses, plus assorted friends, my mother and brother, and especially my sister in law, Shelley Sparks.



## CURRICULUM VITAE

Kathleen Berrin

### Education

- 2018 Ph.D. University of California, Irvine, History
- 2015 M.A. University of California Irvine, History
- 1978 M.A., University of Washington, Anthropology
- 1968 B.A., University of California, Los Angeles,

### Work Experience

- 1987-2011 Curator-in-Charge, Department of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
- 1982-87 Curator, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
- 1977-82 Associate Curator, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
- 1976-77 Assistant Curator, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
- 1971-76 Research Assistant, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
- 1969-70 Teacher, San Ramon Unified School District, Danville, California

## Editorships

- 2010 ***Colossal Masterworks of the Olmec World***  
Co-editor with Virginia Fields and contributor, Yale University Press, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and The Los Angeles County Museum of Art
- 2004 ***Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya***, with Mary Miller and Simon Martin, Editor and Francisco and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- 1999 ***Spirit of Ancient Peru: Treasures from the Museo Arqueologico Rafael Larco Herrera.***  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Editor and contributor
- 1993 ***Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods.***  
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco with Thames & Hudson. Co-editor with Esther Pasztory, and Contributor
- 1988 ***Feathered Serpents and Flowering Trees: Reconstructing Murals of Teotihuacan.***  
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Editor and Contributor
- 1977 ***Art of the Huichol Indians.***  
New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Editor and Contributor

## Articles

- 2017 “National Icons and Political Interests: Memories of Teotihuacan City of the Gods” in *Visual Culture of Ancient Americas*, Andrew Finegold and Ellen Hoobler, eds., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017, 91-102.
- 2016 “Nelson A. Rockefeller: US Art Museums and Diplomacy Before, During, and After World War II,” *Rockefeller Archive Center*

*Research Reports Online,*  
rockarch.org/publications/resrep/berrin.pdf

- 2007 "San Francisco, Mexico, and the Teotihuacan Murals,  
*The Stakes of the Collection in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.* UNESCO, *Museum International*, 2007.
- 1990 "Exploiting a Museum's Resources to Increase Public Access,"  
*Universities and Museums: Partners in Continuing Education*,  
Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institute and the National  
University of Continuing Education Association.
- 1988 "Hands Across the Border: Conservation, Politics, and Ensuing  
Dilemmas," Papers documenting the "Care and Preservation of  
Ethnological Materials" symposium, Ottawa, 1986. Canadian  
Conservation Institute, pp. 90-96.
- 1984 "When Museum Staff Go on Exhibit," *Museum News*, December,  
vol. 63, no. 2, pp. 20-26.

### **Panels /Professional Recognition**

- 2016 Recipient, Rockefeller Archive Grant "Cold War Curators:  
Visual Arts and Diplomacy After World War II"
- 2007 Consultant, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA "Fiery Pool: The  
Maritime World of the Ancient Maya"
- 2006 NEH Panelist: Division of Public Programs,  
Museums Panel, November
- 2000 Presentation Association of Art Museum Directors  
Annual Meeting, Denver, CO. May 31- June 3, 2000  
"Who Owns Our Collections: Cultural Property Update:  
A Balance of Compatible Objectives: Two Case  
Studies; Teotihuacan Murals and Maya Stela"
- 1998 *Recipient: Peruvian National Decoration: Order  
of Merit for Distinguished Services from the President  
of the Republic of Peru, for outstanding achievement*

*in the arts*

1993

Reviewer, NEA panel on Museum Collections.

1986

*Metal from the Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, Mexico City, on the voluntary return of the Teotihuacan Murals to the Government of Mexico*

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

“ What We Are Fighting For”

How World War II Changed the Relationship

Between U.S. Art Museums and the Federal Government

By

Kathleen Berrin

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professors Laura Mitchell and Allison Perlman, Co-Chairs

World War II brought U.S. art museums and key branches of the federal government together to assess, redefine, and utilize the arts in America and deploy art exhibitions for national use. During wartime, art museums focused on building American unity and morale and creating new types of exhibitions to demonstrate political strength and enhance international diplomacy. In addition to producing exhibitions, U.S. art museums shared expertise and worked with army brigades in war zones to identify and protect key monuments of Western art and civilization. These efforts helped enhance the art status of the U.S. and gave American art museums new confidence and responsibilities in exhibition diplomacy. The roles art museums played during the war years laid the foundation for more active deployment of national diplomacy exhibitions after the war and greater participation in socio-political issues but the search for a unified national arts identity premised on exclusionary ideas could no longer continue unchallenged.

## Introduction

U.S. art museums and the federal government did not have much in common until the mid-twentieth century. Until that time the arts were kept separate from the business of State. The urgency of World War II brought them into alignment, creating new definitions of democracy and patriotism that encouraged them to march in tandem. Together they unveiled a new U.S. national identity with an amalgam of Euro-American values in an effort to culturally unify a sprawling and diverse populace and heighten the art status of the U.S. among world nations. The story of the wartime relationship between art museums and the federal government and the effect of their joint national narrative is the subject of this dissertation.

During World War II, key leaders of U.S. art museums and the federal government found that common social needs, operational expediency, and cultural politics bound them closely together. They collaborated to create certain types of persuasive arts exhibitions and save European cultural institutions from Hitler's demise. Then, when the urgency of war was over, museums and government each tried to resume their separate ways although both had been changed by the experience of war and could no longer ignore the socio-political power of the arts.

World War II brought art museums and certain branches of the federal government together to assess, redefine, and utilize the arts in America and deploy exhibitions for national use. During wartime, art museums and government focused on building unity and public morale and on creating new types of exhibitions to demonstrate national strength and international diplomacy. Arts professionals shared technical expertise and worked with army brigades in war zones to identify and protect key monuments of Western European art and

civilization. These collaborative efforts helped enhance the international arts profile of the U.S. and gave art museums new responsibilities in exhibition diplomacy. The roles they played during the war years laid the foundation for more active deployment of national diplomacy exhibitions after the war.

World War II gave art museums and the federal government an opportunity to put the visual arts to work in America. By combining forces and utilizing the structures of two of the nation's foremost art museums-- The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the National Gallery of Art (NGA)-- culturally conscious leaders in museums and government created patriotic exhibitions to bolster national morale and reinforce the war effort. These activities were motivated by a desire to bring America's national art profile more closely into alignment with its growing reputation for economic and military might and strengthen its international art image. America's lack of cultural distinction in the arts had been a nagging problem for the nation's leaders, holding the nation back.

Defining a recognizable national identity in the arts was especially vital to the U.S. government during World War II yet configuring an overarching aesthetic profile was a complicated proposition. The federal government not only wanted to show modernity and progress, it also needed to demonstrate that a democratic citizenry could appreciate classic or timeless traditions and possessed refined cultural discernment relative to a white, elite and relatively well-to-do urban population. This meant that the nation's art museums needed to take on accelerated responsibilities. Special or changing exhibitions were important tools to draw audiences to art museums, educate the populace, and improve public taste, all to advance a vision of shared national identity in a time of crisis. Yet that vision did not include everyone.

This dissertation uses the terms art image or national aesthetic profile to define a visually identifiable national style or cultural aesthetic that was believed to be uniquely American and expressive of the nation as a cohesive whole. It was important to museum directors and government officials assert a distinctive and superior presence since leaders in both enemy and allied countries perceived a nation's arts abilities as a yardstick for measuring national worth. Government concern for America's lagging reputation in the arts was an important inducement for it to become actively involved in supporting art museums at home while saving European arts abroad.

A distinctive, internationally recognized art style had not developed in the U.S. because of the nation's relatively short history, its vast geographic space, and diverse settlement patterns. Older countries such as Italy had an easier time expressing national visual unity because unlike the U.S. they did not develop primarily through foreign immigration and were more culturally homogeneous over a longer period of time. It was ironic for U.S. cultural leaders to be searching for a single, over-arching cultural profile during the 1930s and early 40s, since the diversity of its population and rate of cultural change have been among the country's most characteristic qualities. Such a generalized search denied the diversity of cultural groups in America and contained within it endemic issues of racism. There was a built-in contradiction in the government's creation of an overarching, homogenous ideal for American art and culture as decision makers ignored the realities of diversity, inequality, and difference. Foreign races or ethnicities that migrated to America were expected to blend in and identify with national symbols rather than asserting characteristics of their heritage – including the possibility of different aesthetics.



The federal government had a long history of ambivalence toward elite arts and culture, often defining them as European-derived and incompatible with democratic values.<sup>1</sup> There was also the predicament of regional styles and local identities that proliferated throughout the country. How could American democracy compete with high cultural traditions of European art while it projected so many regional versions of grassroots American identity? Whose arts should be championed -- those of Europe that still carried more prestige internationally or those of America? Did America even *have* a national aesthetic? Closing the gap called for major assistance from U.S. art museums and the American arts community. It took flexibility to build a case for democracy in the arts in America, and art museums were the best resources the federal government had.<sup>2</sup>

During World War II, art museums became intensely patriotic. Under the guidance of government rhetoric they developed two new types of art exhibitions to promote wartime unity: exhibitions of combat arts featuring idealized American military and exhibitions of national diplomacy that honored the elite arts of select foreign nations. These were not the only types of exhibitions featured during World War II, but they were the ones in which the federal government had the most urgent and primary interest. The fact that these types of exhibitions were so repeated and well attended meant that they resonated with mainstream citizens wishing to be cultured and patriotic throughout the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). NEED A PAGE NUMBER

<sup>2</sup> Flora E.S. Kaplan, *Museums and the Making of Ourselves: The Role of Objects in National Identity*. (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1996), 3: "Museums are purveyors of ideology and of a downward spread of knowledge to the public, thereby contributing to an historical process of democratization."

## A National Arts Dilemma

World War II came at a time when the U.S. badly needed to upgrade its cultural standing and international reputation for sophistication in the arts.

Ever since the nineteenth-century observations of Alexis de Tocqueville, foreign travelers had criticized the U.S. for being “uncultured and materialistic.”<sup>3</sup> Visiting British Captain Frederick Marryat noticed an uncultured side to Americans and predicted that they “are not yet, nor will they for many years be, in the true sense of the word, a nation--they are a mass of people cemented together to a certain degree, by a general form of government.”<sup>4</sup> Latin American intellectuals such as José Martí had long accused the U.S. of being an uncultured “colossus of the North.”<sup>5</sup> These criticisms reduced national confidence and served as painful reminders to cultural leaders that in the eyes of foreign observers the nation lacked depth and sophistication.

At the end of World War I, American literary critic Van Wyck Brooks wrote a lengthy article called “On Creating a Useable Past” that became a public topic of discussion.<sup>6</sup> It demonstrated urgency for America to find “a useable past” or a substantive visual essence that reflected a distinctive national culture. Brooks urged Americans “to discover or invent an American national culture for themselves if they could not find one.”<sup>7</sup> He also declared that

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<sup>3</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville was a nineteenth-century French diplomat, political scientist, and historian who traveled to parts of the U.S. He wrote *Democracy in America*, 4 vol. (1835–40), an analysis of the political and social system of the United States in the early nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Marryat, *Diary in America* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Bloomington Press, 1960), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Vera M. Kutzinski. “Borders and Bodies: The United States, America, and the Caribbean.” CR: *The New Centennial Review* 1, no. 2 (2001): 55-88. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>(accessed August 7, 2018)

<sup>6</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Useable Past,” *The Dial* (April 11, 1918): 337-341.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 337

this “travesty of a civilization” needed new values and direction in order to give meaning to American life. Cultural leaders at all levels began to chide the nation for its “tendency toward materialistic standards.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1921, historian and critic Lewis Mumford published an article in a widely respected journal. He asked:

What is it that has made American taste sickly and derivative, a mere echo of old notes, which reverberate in the halls of museums or tremble dimly in ancient houses and forgotten attics? Why is there no comparison for freshness and aesthetic strength...What caused the collapse of taste during the last hundred years, and what is responsible for its present anaemia [sic] – a pathetic state in which beauty lives for us only through repeated ‘transfusions’ from other cultures?<sup>9</sup>

Mumford emphasized that Europeans were creators while Americans had become collectors or imitators. He stated “the pictures we put on our walls...our china, our silverware, our furniture, are all copies or close adaptations of things we have found in Europe.”<sup>10</sup> Cultural and political leaders took these comments to heart and recognized that America had a complicated art problem that needed to be addressed on national and international levels.

Since the quality of a nation’s arts was believed to be a measure of national substance, the federal government and U.S. cultural leaders were increasingly compelled to assert a heightened art image. The arts challenge to U.S. leadership became all the more pressing as Hitler disabled key European cities and arts centers, and threatened the arts of Western civilization. How could the United States close the perceived gap between an uncultured or

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Parker, “Federal Sponsored Community Art Centers.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Art Reference Round Table October 15, 1938. *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, 32, no. 11: 907-810.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Mumford, *American Taste* (Westgate Press, 1929), 3. First published as an article in *Harper’s Magazine*, October 1921, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-16.

boorish America and a young nation asserting its democratic power and might on the global stage?

Coupled with the desire to improve the national arts image was a recurring interest or curiosity that Americans had in “the foreign.” As early as the Progressive Period (1890-1920), middle-class consumers were interested in acquiring certain types of foreign goods to emphasize America’s imperialistic status, expressing a fascination with other parts of the world by consuming foreign products at home.<sup>11</sup> It could be similarly argued that visual consumption of foreign art in the safety of one’s country, within the edifices of an American museum, made such experiences attractive to some mid-century citizens.<sup>12</sup>

World wars I and II forced the issue of “the foreign” even further into national consciousness. America’s boys were sent to fight in many exotic parts of the world. How could their families make sense of this? These places and experiences seemed so alien to the American way of life. Families back home likely looked to images in the media and museums for reassurance about the welfare of U.S. troops and America’s new emerging place in the world. As will be shown, certain types of high-visibility exhibitions held by MoMA and NGA in the late 1930’s and 1940’s addressed this public need for information.

How was America’s arts dilemma addressed? None of it was carefully planned or calculated. Certain worldwide events such as the Great Depression and World War II required national responses. Through the skills of museum professionals, art exhibitions began to be

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<sup>11</sup> Kristin Hoganson, *Consumers Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity 1865-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> America’s emulation of European arts and a desire for European goods can be documented from early settlement of the continent. See Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

used for messages of statecraft, to support allies, or smooth over ambivalent relationships between countries. Even if the United States did not possess great arts traditions of its own, as competing nations might claim, it had the power and wealth to own, display, or protect great European art.

Three things happened to ameliorate America's arts problems during the 1930's and 40's: 1) Museums expanded, projected, and uplifted the arts in America by offering high-visibility special exhibitions, 2) American forces "saved" European art from Nazi destruction and proved U.S. managerial arts expertise to the world, and 3) U.S. art museums began to carve out an exhibitionary "middle ground" where the U.S. could utilize high-visibility exhibitions of foreign art to help negotiate the changing needs of diplomacy.<sup>13</sup>

The unveiling of two new art museums-- MoMA in New York (1929) and the NGA in Washington D.C. (1941)-- was fundamental to these efforts. Both museums became sources of national pride that were lauded at the presidential level and both took on major responsibilities to articulate America's art policy during the war. Because MoMA and NGA had strong resources and connections with the federal government, it chose to utilize them more than other museums.<sup>14</sup> NGA and MoMA served as models or trendsetters for curators and directors in

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<sup>13</sup> Philip J. Deloria, "What is the Middle Ground Anyway?" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 63, no.1, 2006, 15-22. The middle ground is a process of cultural encounter where two or more sides come together in a possibly unstable relationship and misinterpret or distort the others belief systems in order to make sense of it and get along together. See also Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 52.

<sup>14</sup> While other important museums in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cambridge, Brooklyn, Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Worcester, Newark, and San Francisco made individual innovative contributions to early exhibitions in America, it was the NGA and MoMA that attracted national and international attention.

sister institutions, with the older and larger Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Met) running a close third.<sup>15</sup>

The stimulus provided by World War II helped the federal government and U.S. art museums put public perceptions of art into alignment with wartime definitions of democracy and freedom. The war also emphasized the importance of seeing national arts as a window into cultural understanding. Unlike foreign words, expressive iconic images seemed more readily comprehensible. If, as many leaders believed, the heart and soul of a country was embedded in a nation's greatest artworks, it was possible for cultural understanding to be communicated across foreign borders by scrutinizing another nation's art.<sup>16</sup> Many leaders were convinced the finest arts of nations could create a common cross-cultural understanding, sorely needed in times of conflict.

The Depression years laid the groundwork but it took the urgency of World War II, certain charismatic leaders, the cooperation of museums, and at least minimal support from the federal government to help address the vexing problem of America's inferior arts status. As a prelude to understanding what lays at the heart of this dissertation some general background on American art museums and the federal government and the arts before World War II is necessary.

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<sup>15</sup> The Met was founded in 1870 but its earliest roots go back to 1866 in Paris when a group of Americans decided it was necessary to create a "national institution and gallery of art" to bring art and art education to the American people.

<sup>16</sup> The philosophy of Nelson Rockefeller, discussed in Chapter 4, fully supported this this point of view.

## Art Museums and Traveling Exhibitions Before World War II

Art museums in America have a divided and contradictory history.<sup>17</sup> At one extreme, they have been celebrated as institutions devoted to democratizing culture, and on the other, they have been criticized for serving as the exclusionary preserve of social elites. It has been difficult for American art museums to try to serve opposing constituencies: to accommodate the needs and expectations of the wealthy, to whom they are often beholden, while striving to fulfill more democratic, popular needs. Between the late nineteenth century and World War II, art museums depended on elite individuals, civic entities, or philanthropic organizations for their development, livelihood, and support. They had very little involvement or funding from the federal government before World War II.

U.S. art museums often developed in cities that had hosted world's fairs or international expositions.<sup>18</sup> These events were competitions to promote national industry and commerce that featured competitive displays of world arts.<sup>19</sup> Cities such as St. Louis, Chicago, San Francisco, New York, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Buffalo all established civic art museums after hosting World's Fairs. U.S. museums generally tried to model themselves after grander European museums, such as the Louvre in Paris or the National Gallery in Britain. In

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<sup>17</sup> See Sally Duncan, *Paul J. Sachs and the Institutionalization of Museum Culture Between the World Wars*, PhD. diss., Tufts University 2001, 18.

<sup>18</sup> George Brown Goode, *Principles of Museum Administration*, Washington, D.C., 1895. (Reprinted from the Annual Report of the Museums Association. (New York: Coultas & Volanis, 1895), 4.

<sup>19</sup> See Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's A Fair: Visions of Empire at America's International Expositions 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Cheryl R. Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Abigail M. Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco: The Pacific Rim, the Great West & California at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

adopting these models, art museums were torn between balancing American ideals of the equality and European traditions of hierarchy.<sup>20</sup>

Civic art museums represented municipal progress, pride, and economic wellbeing and ambitious American cities wanted to construct art museums to demonstrate their wealth and sophistication.<sup>21</sup> They depended upon wealthy donors or philanthropists for their existence and maintenance. Roughly sixty percent of art museums founded prior to 1930 had private governing authorities and were mostly located in big cities on the east coast or mid-west that had the wealth and social networks for support.<sup>22</sup>

Art museums in U.S. cities obtained a much later start than their counterparts in Europe. Connoisseurs generally agreed that the finest world arts had developed or were located in Europe. There were problems in America with building comprehensive collections of European or American art. European fine art was a priority for most U.S. museums, however the majority of museums obtained such works not by purchase but by donation from wealthy U.S. collectors. Acquiring donations required that museum personnel develop special skills to appeal to collectors or flatter them, and juggle institutional values to make their museum attractive to prospective donors.

For a time, reproductions of European art were acceptable in U.S. museums for educational purposes. It was difficult for museums to justify filling their galleries only with

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<sup>20</sup> The earliest U.S. *art* museums, such as the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Connecticut (1844) or the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York (1870) got started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Peale Museum of Baltimore (1814) was comprised of equal parts paintings and natural history.

<sup>21</sup> "The public museum is a necessity in every highly civilized community." George Brown Goode, *The Museums of the Future* in *Annual Report of the Museums of the United States National Museum. Year ending June 30, 1897*. Washington D.C., 1898, 7.

<sup>22</sup> J. Mark Schuster, "Neither Public Nor Private: The Hybridization of Museums." *Journal of Cultural Economics* 22, nos. 2-3 (1998): 134.



American art. If original European or ancient artworks were unavailable, it was common for American art museums to display copies of original paintings or plaster casts of sculptures of the greatest known works so that a full story of the development of world art could be told.<sup>23</sup> Reproductions could convey important ideas and fill in the major gaps in a world chronology of art.<sup>24</sup>

After the Civil War, pockets of American society gradually developed the means to collect high-level works of European art. With the industrial boom and the rise of entrepreneurs during the Gilded Age and the Progressive Period, wealthy citizens now had the resources to collect Old Master paintings.<sup>25</sup> At this time, cities were fiercely vying with each other for civic prestige and acclaim since the opening of a museum was a sign of sophistication. Some benefactors bestowed their vast art wealth on museums they built in their home cities; Parts of the country with wealthy citizen-benefactors such as Manhattan, Brooklyn, Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, and Boston became magnets for the arts while outlying regions were left behind. The federal government did not have a ministry of culture to administer the arts; it left the support of the arts to civic museums or to non-governmental philanthropic organizations, wealthy individuals, or foundations.

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<sup>23</sup> Lois Marie Fink, *A History of the Smithsonian American Art Museum: The Intersection of Art, Science, and Bureaucracy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2007), 17.

<sup>24</sup> See Allan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1998), 38-56 on “the battle of the casts” and “the cult of the original” in museums. He cites circa 1910 as the turning point when the Met and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston decided casts were no longer suitable for public display. For a perspective on American museums and casts of pre-Columbian art, see Diana Fane, “Reproducing the Pre-Columbian Past: Casts and Models in Exhibitions of Ancient America, 1824-1935,” in Elizabeth Hill Boone, ed., *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 141-176.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Votero, “To Collect and Conquer: American Collections in the Gilded Age” *Transatlantica*, 2018. <http://journal.openedition.org/transatlantica/6492> (accessed May 2017)

Lacking ties with the federal government, U.S. art museums attained an independence that was different from most European art museums. American art museums had a much greater opportunity for individuality than European museums that were structurally connected to state governments and therefore more conservative.<sup>26</sup> For example, although national museums in Britain have had some periods of relative independence, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the British state corralled museums for moral and educational purposes.<sup>27</sup>

By the 1920's, museums in the U.S. had developed two major institutional philosophies and were divided by the types of audiences they served.<sup>28</sup> Some museums were patterned after the style of Benjamin Ives Gilman at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (founded 1870) and followed the "traditional model" of museum as elite temple with European art at the pinnacle. Other museums reflected the "progressive model" of John Cotton Dana at the Newark Museum (founded 1909) that catered more to local civic identity or commerce, public education, and industrial arts.<sup>29</sup> From approximately 1920 to 1940 there was a gradual pendulum swing from elite "ivory tower" museums to those more dedicated to promoting public education, local civic

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<sup>26</sup> Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870–1930* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Sheila Watson and Andrew Sawyer, "National Museums in Britain." In *European National Museums: Identity Politics the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen*. Peter Aronsson & Gabriella Elegenius (eds), Linköping University Electronic Press. <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp.home/index.en.aspx?issue=064> (accessed October 2016)

<sup>28</sup> See Paul J. DiMaggio, "Constructing an Organizational Field as a Professional Project: US Art Museums, 1920-1940" in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 267-29.

<sup>29</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Newark Museum both had very early exhibitions and programs promoting industrial arts. See Nicholas Maffei. "John Cotton Dana and the Politics of Exhibiting Industrial Art in the U.S. 1909-1929" *Journal of Design History* 4, no.13, 2000: 301.

identity, and commerce.<sup>30</sup> American art museums could choose to emphasize either pole or develop an intermediate position in between.

Early museums in America operated on a civic rather than a national basis. Occasionally, they or outside groups managed to organize temporary loan exhibitions of arts from Europe that helped supplement the dearth of European arts in the U.S., but most of these exhibitions were of contemporary arts that select countries were interested in marketing and offered for sale. Many U.S. museums might have preferred to exhibit older or more classic arts of foreign countries but they did not have the means or political connections to acquire such works or the resources to bring loan exhibitions to America.

Temporary Old Master exhibitions had a long tradition in Europe where they were representations of state power, nationalism, or victory in war. Influential people organized these exhibitions that were designed to be “ephemeral” or time-limited.<sup>31</sup> Such extravaganzas were held in large European cities so that all classes of people could see them and constituted unifying events attended by royalty and commoners alike.<sup>32</sup> The 1871 Hans Holbein exhibition in Dresden and the 1889 Rembrandt exhibition in Amsterdam are two examples of exhibitions that had an enormous impact in Europe. England and Italy also did comprehensive exhibitions of Old Master paintings to demonstrate their power and wealth. Such large, impressive shows continued in the twentieth century and could be focused on a wide span of national arts over time or the works of a single genius claimed by the nation.

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<sup>30</sup> DiMaggio, 1991.

<sup>31</sup> See Frances Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. PAGE

Influenced by grand European exhibitions, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Met) presented the “Hudson Fulton Exhibition of Dutch Golden Age Paintings” in 1909 that purported to be the first Old Master exhibition ever held in America.<sup>33</sup> This massive exhibition was part of a larger citywide festival. It consisted of one hundred and fifty paintings by Dutch masters, drawn completely from private collections in the United States, and was organized by financier J.P. Morgan and other New York civic leaders.<sup>34</sup> Juxtaposed against the Dutch paintings were a selection of American handicrafts and decorative arts that dated from the time of Henry Hudson to that of Robert Fulton.<sup>35</sup> It signaled to American and European art aficionados that Americans had long appreciated homegrown arts or crafts and also demonstrated a heightened means, sophistication, and ability to amass European art.<sup>36</sup>

The Hudson-Fulton Exhibition drew national prestige because it was planned in collaboration with the larger Hudson-Fulton Celebration of the City of New York.<sup>37</sup> This three hundred year anniversary marked the first exploration of the Hudson River by Henry Hudson in 1609 and the introduction of steam power on the river by Robert Fulton in 1807. The celebration had a huge organizing committee of city leaders and was marked by a two-week

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<sup>33</sup> I am grateful to archivist Jim Moske for informing me of his institution’s extensive files on this exhibition and making them available: Hudson-Fulton Celebration 1909. Museum Archives. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>34</sup> The exhibition was an early example of N.Y. wishing to assert its cultural preeminence, arts strength, and identity. It was a citywide celebration of naval and military might coupled with technological abilities proclaiming the paddle steamer, Panama Canal, and the U.S. Navy as examples of excellence.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Hudson was a British explorer who discovered the Hudson Bay and River in 1607; Robert Fulton invented the steamboat in 1807. See also Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Catalogue of A Collection of Paintings by Dutch Masters of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1910).

<sup>36</sup> Dennis P. Weller, “The Hudson-Fulton Exhibition of 1909 and Its Legacy” in *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2001*. Joyce Diane Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott, eds., Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art. *The Hudson-Fulton celebration. Catalogue of an exhibition held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art commemorative of the tercentenary of the discovery of the Hudson River by Henry Hudson in the year 1609, and the centenary of the first use of steam in the navigation of said river by Robert Fulton in the year 1807*. (New York, September to November, MCMIX, 1909).

fete of parades, contests, programs, and regattas of warships and commercial vessels sent by countries such as Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Mexico. Though not technically a world's fair, it was very much in the tradition of competitive world's fairs acknowledging state power and received nationwide press attention.

From time to time, the Met presented exhibitions of contemporary European art with the help of an outside scholar named Christian Brinton as curator. Brinton organized exhibitions of contemporary Belgian, Russian, Soviet, and Swedish arts at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo (1912), the Brooklyn Museum (1916), and at other civic art museums in New York and Pennsylvania in the 1920's and 30's. He wanted to prove that 20<sup>th</sup> century modern art was strongly influenced by nationalist expression or a nation's primary ethnicity.<sup>38</sup> Themes of foreign loan exhibitions Brinton was involved in focused solely on arts of white, European-derived regions such as Germany, Scandinavia, or Russia, in keeping with preferential racial typologies.

Brinton's ideas suggested a biological determinism in the arts and proposed that enduring resemblances in what constituted an outstanding national art derived from specific races or blood groups. A 1936 article by Meyer Schapiro later addressed these growing misconceptions about race, nationality and art but they nevertheless appealed to museums and politicians as easy explanations that supported nationalistic views and interest in foreign arts.<sup>39</sup> To make cultural messages like this readily understandable, the styles of artworks presented in the Brinton exhibitions were realistic rather than expressionistic or abstract. This was probably

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<sup>38</sup> See Andrew Walker, "Critic, Curator, Collector: Christian Brinton and the Exhibition of National Modernism in America" PhD diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "Race, Nationality and Art," *Art Front* 11 (March 1936) 10-12.

because a national aesthetic had to be readily identifiable and the acceptance of experimental forms of “modern art” in America, whether foreign or homegrown, was hesitant and sometimes even antagonistic.

For example, it was widely recognized that public reactions to abstract art in the controversial 1913 “Armory Show” in New York were negative or generally dismissed with contempt.<sup>40</sup> It would take even more time for misconceptions about foreign arts and peoples to lessen in mainstream America. MoMA’s founding director Alfred Barr believed there was a turning point sometime in the 20s and 30’s when more sophisticated Americans began to be curious about, tolerate, or even begin to enjoy modern art.<sup>41</sup>

A critical change took place in the 1920’s that institutionalized and professionalized art museums in America.<sup>42</sup> Paul Sachs, of the Goldman Sachs family of financiers, developed a “Museum Course” at Harvard University. Under his guidance, Harvard’s prestigious Fogg Art Museum became a training ground for elite art museum directors.<sup>43</sup> Emphasizing values of modernism, progressivism and art connoisseurship, Sachs sought professional art contacts in Europe and business-like comportment for museum directors. He began to create professional “museum men” and his post-graduate training course at Harvard became the most well regarded form of training for art museum professionals.<sup>44</sup> Museums throughout America

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<sup>40</sup> Many Americans thought the N.Y. Armory Show of 1913, the first large exhibition of modern art in America, was indecent and radical. See Walt Kuhn, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York, 1938).

<sup>41</sup> Alfred Barr, “Report: An Effort to Secure \$3,150,000. For the Museum of Modern Art, Official Statement,” New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1931, 1-103.

<sup>42</sup> For an in-depth discussion of this subject, see Duncan, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Kathryn Brush, *Vastly More than Brick & Mortar: Reinventing the Fogg Art Museum in the 1920’s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). The Fogg Art Museum opened in 1895.

<sup>44</sup> Duncan, 2001. Women were accepted into the program but they deferred to male expertise; they were considered necessary for support positions in museum curatorial work and education rather than administration.

looked to Sachs for advice and counsel in setting up their professional staff and institutional structures and he played a major role in developing art museum standards and expertise in the 1930's and 1940's.<sup>45</sup>

Sachs' view of art tended to favor more aristocratic views of museum judgment, and some segments of society blamed art museums for prohibiting the growth of what they felt could be the development of "a healthy, living American art."<sup>46</sup> Critics were concerned that museums were encouraging Americans to imitate or contemplate European art instead of making or celebrating the arts of their own country. While museums could decide the proportions and types of European and American arts they wished to exhibit, their choices were contingent on complicated factors such as mission, endowments, benefactors, collection availability, facilities, or audience. Some museums such as the Met were interested in modern American art while others were less certain about how to represent it and preferred more traditional arts.

Traveling art exhibitions that brought arts to the people proved to be an attractive and feasible way for museums to broaden their audiences and bring the arts to smaller cities and towns in the 1930's. Developing loan exhibitions took up valuable staff time and required resources that many museums did not possess so other sources rose to create them and offer them at low cost. Temporary or touring exhibitions could be shown at multiple venues for limited time periods. These exhibitions provided fresh ideas and novelty for museums that

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<sup>45</sup> Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural entrepreneurship in nineteenth-century Boston: the creation of an organizational base for high culture in America" *Media, Culture, and Society* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 33-50.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah St. John Trent, "Art Reference Round Table" *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 32, no. 11, Proceedings of the Annual Conference (October 15, 1938): 807.

lacked strong permanent collections. They were also an important way to improve arts education throughout America.

The American Federation of Arts (AFA) was the earliest philanthropic organization dedicated to circulating special exhibitions. Founded in 1909, the AFA was the first government-authorized organization in America to develop traveling exhibitions that brought the arts to the people. The kinds of exhibitions it sent to small towns or rural communities included “Oil Paintings by Prominent American Artists” (1909), “30 Watercolors” (1909), and “35 Photographs of Famous Monuments and Other Works of Art” (1910). The AFA was also interested in advancing the American cause internationally and promoting democratic beliefs, values, and political institutions by exhibiting American art abroad. Between 1913-1927 it secured U.S. representation in expositions in Rome, Buenos Aires, France, London, and Amsterdam.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1920's the College Art Association (CAA) began to send traveling exhibitions to American colleges, universities, and small museums as part of its mission to promote excellence in the scholarship and teach history and criticism of the visual arts. These exhibitions were based on a program inspired by philosopher and reformer John Dewey and the Barnes Foundation that emphasized “experience-based learning in the fine arts.”<sup>48</sup> As part of his philosophy of education, Dewey developed a vigorous theory of “art in society” or “art as experience” that influenced art education in America throughout much of the twentieth

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<sup>47</sup> Other aspects of the AFA will be discussed in the next section. For an outline of AFA activities, see George G. King (Foreword), *A.F.A.: A Century in the Arts*. [www.afaweb.org/publications/documents/finalcomplete.pdf](http://www.afaweb.org/publications/documents/finalcomplete.pdf) (accessed September 2, 2018)

<sup>48</sup> Pharmaceutical entrepreneur Albert Barnes, who had amassed a collection of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Modernist paintings, began the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia in 1922. He was fascinated with the theories of John Dewey and asked him to become its first president and director. See Margaret Hess Johnson, “John Dewey’s Socially Instrumental Practice at the Barnes Foundation and the Role of “Transferred Values” in Aesthetic Experience” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 43-57.



century.<sup>49</sup> Dewey believed that the expressive object prompted an individual's self-awareness and illuminated their everyday life by reminding them of their highest responsibilities to society. The CAA exhibitions of 1924-1937 were supported by grants from the Carnegie Foundation but the program ended due to lack of funding.<sup>50</sup>

The Harmon Foundation in New York was best known for its encouragement of African American art during the Harlem Renaissance. It offered awards for distinguished service in the category of Negro artist and sent out traveling exhibitions of their work between 1929-1939. Its first circulating show, "An Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by American Negro Artists," premiered at the International House in Manhattan in 1929 and parts of the exhibition traveled to twelve other venues.<sup>51</sup> However, the exhibition was not seen widely and did not attract national attention. It traveled to Washington D.C. where it was shown in the foyer of the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries building.<sup>52</sup> The Harmon Foundation exhibitions later came under criticism from outspoken African-American cultural leaders who saw the paradox of promoting segregated exhibitions of all-black artists within a democracy.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> An early influential work by Dewey is *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916).

<sup>50</sup> Cristin Tierney, "A Stimulating Prospect: CAA's Traveling Exhibition Program 1929-1937" In *The Eye the Hand the Mind: 100 Years of the College Art Association*. Susan Ball, ed. (The College Art Association: New York and Rutgers University Press, 2011): 33-39.

<sup>51</sup> Two years earlier the School of the Art Institute of Chicago held an exhibition called "The Negro in Art Week" that was well publicized and achieved national attention. The Chicago Women's Club organized it. See Lisa Meyerowitz, "The Negro in Art Week: Defining the "New Negro" Through Art Exhibition," *African American Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring, 1997): 75-89.

<sup>52</sup> Since the exhibition was small, a non-gallery location was practical, however the location where artworks are presented signals their importance to museum visitors. This exhibition had no impact on the Smithsonian's national identity and did not attract attention in national discourse. Yet the fact that the Smithsonian presented this works at all is commendable. See Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011): 22.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Anne Calo, *Distinction and Denial: Race, Nation, and the Critical Construction of the African American Artist, 1920-40* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007), 186.

In the 1930's there was a demand for traveling art exhibitions that exceeded AFA or CAA offerings. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) developed an economically feasible and popular traveling exhibition program in 1933 that offered exhibitions of "modern art" to schools and small museums. The Director, Alfred Barr, Jr., and the museum board believed such exhibitions were integral to MoMA's mission to educate the nation in modern art. MoMA tried hard to accommodate these requests by offering low cost exhibitions tailor-made for select audiences.

The demand for MoMA exhibitions was part of the wave of the 1930's that heralded a trend for increased visual culture resulting from contemporary ideas of democracy fostered by the New Deal.<sup>54</sup> American art museums recognized they could take advantage of public interest in visual representation by creating more provocative, visitor-centered exhibitions on public issues. To enhance this effort, museums undertook scientific studies to determine how to maximize visitor enjoyment and education through exhibition methods and layout.<sup>55</sup> Administrators of major art museums carefully measured the success of exhibitions by counting attendance figures.

To a large extent, art museums of the 1930's and 1940's were places for teaching, exhibiting, and perpetuating normative American values of the dominant culture. Elite directors, trustees, or senior curatorial staff, the majority of whom were white and male, made curatorial choices for collections and exhibitions. Artworks from European-based cultures were

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<sup>54</sup> Isadora Helfgott, *Framing the Audience: Art and the Politics of Culture in the United States 1929-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2015), 118.

<sup>55</sup> Science museums were especially interested in making such studies. See New York Museum of Science and Industry, *Exhibition Techniques: A Summary of Exhibition Practice, Based on Surveys Conducted at the New York and San Francisco World's Fairs of 1934* (New York, Rockefeller Center, 1940) and Carlos Emmons Cummings, M.D. *East is East and West is West: Some Observations on the World's Fairs of 1939 by one whose main interest is in museums* (Buffalo Museum of Science, 1940).

given highest priority. Decisions about art and discourse were made from the perspective of experts. Museums were located in places most easily accessible to white populations and they audiences they served were overwhelmingly white.

During the Depression many art museums were exploring the definition of what constituted art in America and how to make their displays more attractive. Museums were busy experimenting with different types of art presentations and subjects and looking for ways to enhance their displays and draw in larger audiences. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. (NGA) both developed in the 1930's and were partial answers to the problem of America's unclear artistic image. Both developed from private citizens and consciously worked to reinforce the status of arts in America. The MoMA was dedicated to progressivism and modernity; the NGA was dedicated to tradition and classical arts. Together they announced to the world that the lagging arts identity of the U.S. needed to be reconsidered. They presented arts continuum of the modern and the classical that was comprehensive and covered all the bases.

The following section will provide an overview of the federal government and the arts prior to World War II. It will begin by emphasizing the government's long-time lack of interest in the arts and its dependence on private organizations to fulfill national cultural needs. It will demonstrate how events that occurred during the Great Depression caused the federal government to take a more active role in promoting the arts. Just as art museums were evolving towards increasing their audiences and playing a stronger educational role in society, the government was recognizing new responsibilities during an ensuing national crisis. Art

events that transpired during the Great Depression laid the groundwork for marshaling the nation's art museums during World War II.

### **The Federal Government and the Arts Prior to World War II**

While European countries commonly developed Ministries of the Arts to monitor or administer the national arts, the U.S. federal government had shown a long-standing indifference or disinterest in the subject.<sup>56</sup> Scholars who have commented on this subject have reasoned that European notions of elite or fine arts did not mesh well with pragmatics of American democracy that lauded the common man over the aristocrat. They also explain that it was difficult to apply standards of European "high art" to homegrown American artistic productions emphasizing that the majority of ordinary Americans much preferred to have their arts be functional and look realistic. The federal government's support for the arts was severely limited to making pragmatic improvements in beautifying the capital or commissioning decorations for the interiors of government buildings. It generally left U.S. arts support to private entities, wealthy individuals, or philanthropic organizations.

The Smithsonian Institution demonstrates an early federal arts dilemma and provides an excellent example of ambivalence in the arts.<sup>57</sup> In 1835 the federal government received a windfall cultural gift from a "foreigner." This large bequest from an Englishman named Joseph

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<sup>56</sup> See for example Gary O. Larson, *The Reluctant Patron, The United States Government and the Arts 1943-1965* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Alan Howard Levy, *Government and the Arts: debates over Federal Support of the Arts in America from George Washington to Jesse Helms* (University Press of America, 1997); Michael L. Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Michael Kammen, *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture* (New York: First Vintage Books, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> See Fink, 2007.

Smithson (1765-1829) caused considerable debate in Congress about whether or not a donation from a foreigner should be accepted and, if so, how it should be used. According to Smithson's will, the purpose of the donation was "to found at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an Establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men."<sup>58</sup> Once Congress decided to accept the gift, it took eleven more years for congressional leaders to decide how to utilize it.

By 1846, when the Smithsonian Institution was finally established, it was vaguely described as "a multifaceted gallery" and the bill supporting it barely passed both houses of Congress.<sup>59</sup> It was difficult to envision how arts and sciences could be accommodated into a single administrative body, under the aegis of the federal government. The Smithsonian was essentially a broad, multifaceted library and gallery system devoted to wide-ranging areas of the sciences and arts. In establishing an arts section, the category of arts was fused into the government's federal bureaucracy.<sup>60</sup> The Smithsonian did not highlight the arts. To remedy this neglect, William Wilson Corcoran tried to establish a separate national gallery of painting and sculpture in the city of Washington, D.C. during the Civil War. The decentralized nature of the nation at that time thwarted Corcoran's ambitions.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>59</sup> House of Representatives, (HR 5, 28<sup>th</sup> Congress) *Bill to Establish the Smithsonian Institution*. August 10, 1846 (9 Stat 102).

<sup>60</sup> The Smithsonian Castle was completed in 1855. The Arts and Industries Building was founded 1881. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and very early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were sporadic arts displays inside the Smithsonian Castle, an administrative center informally serving as the "U.S. National Museum," located inside the national Arts and Industries Building. See Fink, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> There was also the additional problem that Corcoran was most interested in emphasizing contemporary American art. See Wallach, 1996, 113-126.

It became incumbent upon the U.S. to represent the arts of the nation in World's Fairs, especially prior to World War II. Since national arts displays were of considerable interest to other nations, the federal government sensed some pressure to participate in international arts competitions and display impressive works by American artists. America had its share of prestigious, civic-originated world's fairs on U.S. soil in which displays of U.S. arts were expected but not supported by Congress. Museums and civic leaders put them together. Any lack of arts excellence was easily compensated for with more impressive portrayals of American technological, industrial, and economic prowess.

Certain elite citizens saw arts and crafts as a way to educate foreign immigrants. An influx of immigrants during the Progressive Period (1890-1920) led to development of programs to modernize or "Americanize" newcomers who were lacking in refinement or behaving in conspicuously boorish foreign ways. Art or aesthetic appreciation was considered an antidote to encourage proper demeanor, good citizenship, and eradicate immigrant ways. "Settlement houses" or community centers offered in large cities and often managed by affluent female citizens like Jane Addams at Hull House of Chicago, provided, social services, art exhibitions, and art classes to immigrants, and taught them American culture.<sup>62</sup> Around the same time, the Arts and Crafts Movement with its emphasis on truth in material, form, and function became popular in America, giving additional rationale for the creation of local arts and crafts and affecting museum presentations.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Victoria Grieve, *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 16-18.

<sup>63</sup> The Arts and Crafts Movement, which began in England, was international in scope. It was a reaction against industrialism and excessive ornate design and ornamentation on commercial products and advocated reform in the arts. See Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

In 1909, there were vast regions of the United States with little or no access to the visual arts and whose populations remained uncultured. President Theodore Roosevelt saw the need for some kind of a national organization that could “bring arts to remote areas of the American hinterland” by creating circulating exhibitions of paintings by living artists throughout the U.S. If people throughout the nation could view exhibitions of original artworks, cultural leaders and politicians hoped that their taste and quality of life could be substantially improved.<sup>64</sup>

Roosevelt approved the creation of the American Federation of Arts (AFA) as an advisory committee to the President, to be financially supported by its own Board of Trustees, national membership fees, grants and contributions, and program fees.

Elihu Root, who served as the nation’s Secretary of State and was a close advisor to President Roosevelt, was the first President of AFA. Root believed that international political conflict stemmed from cultural differences, and that a nation’s arts could be a useful device to bring countries together and resolve political differences. He encouraged the AFA to develop two kinds of exhibitions: those that educated populations in rural areas or small towns in America and those that helped promote American influence and prestige in European cities. The AFA was the first American institution dedicated to circulating art exhibitions of original works of art, however its exhibition activities were soon diluted by many other causes the AFA was asked to take on in order to advocate for U.S. artists and arts organizations.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> United States Bureau of Education, "American Federation of Arts," Reports of the Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909): 54–56. See also “A Century in the Arts: AFA History” [www.amfedarts.org/about-the-afa/afa-history](http://www.amfedarts.org/about-the-afa/afa-history) (accessed June, 2015)

<sup>65</sup>United States Bureau of Education, "American Federation of Arts," Reports of the Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C., 1909 Government Printing Office) 1 (5748): 54–56. See also “A Century in the Arts: AFA History” [www.amfedarts.org/about-the-afa/afa-history](http://www.amfedarts.org/about-the-afa/afa-history). Accessed June 2015

It was apparent to the AFA and philanthropists early in the century that a stronger national arts profile or arts presence for America was necessary to develop or fuel national diplomatic channels and bolster the national image. Philanthropic organizations connected with powerful individuals, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, stepped forward to take the initiative. They used their resources to forge cordial diplomatic relations with countries that were economically useful to the American government.<sup>66</sup> This worked reasonably well and for a time the federal government was relieved of arts concerns until the priorities of American philanthropic organizations and the federal government began to fall out of sync in the 1930's.<sup>67</sup> In 1938, a special Division of Cultural Relations was unveiled within the Department of State and charged with taking on more cultural relations responsibilities.<sup>68</sup>

It took devastating economic problems of the Great Depression to motivate the federal government to do something about the arts in America. President Roosevelt developed relief programs to help out-of-work artists within the Federal Art Project (FAP) the Second New Deal.<sup>69</sup> At their peak, government relief projects employed more than five thousand artists a year and created new audiences for art through ambitious teaching and exhibition programs

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<sup>66</sup> See Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: US Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations 1938-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also William J. Buxton ed., *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy's Transformation of Culture, Communication, and Humanities*. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> The reasons for this were varied. Often foundations were geographically constrained by their mission statements to focus on particular world areas. Sometimes they preferred to use their funds for new and innovative projects rather than to pay for ongoing programs. *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> Ninkovich, 1981, 28.

<sup>69</sup> The numbers of American visual artists had boomed during the 1920's. See Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz. *New Deal for Art: Government Art Projects of the 1930's with Examples from New York City and State*. New York: Gallery Association of New York State, 1977.



held in over one hundred community art centers.<sup>70</sup> These community art centers were fundamental in establishing the importance of non-elite arts as part of a new social movement in American society. Historian Michael Denning has noted the laboring of American culture in literature, theatre, music, film, and some types of visual art but he does not discuss the laboring of art museums.<sup>71</sup> This is probably because art museums were not directly involved with New Deal Programs. Yet the definition of visual arts in America was about to be transformed by the vision of an Icelandic immigrant named Holger Cahill.

Holger Cahill served as National Director of the FAP of the Works Progress Administration. He had become an American citizen and worked under Director John Cotton Dana, the innovative museum pioneer of Newark Museum who believed art museums should be useful to society. Cahill had distinguished himself by becoming acting director of MoMA between 1932-33 and mounting a definitive American folk art exhibition entitled “Art of the Common Man in America.” He had also directed a major Municipal Art Exhibition sponsored by New York’s Mayor La Guardia.

Cahill was invited to come to Washington in 1935 to interview with the Works Progress Administration, the most ambitious New Deal agency employed to carry out public works and help put the nation back on its feet. His outspoken opinions on the arts must have been impressive and he was offered the position of directing the Federal Art Project (FAP). This government agency was intended to provide relief for unemployed artists. Cahill also used the FAP to work on America’s national image problem, to increase American arts appreciation, and

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<sup>70</sup> Wendy Jeffers, “Holger Cahill and American Art,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 31, no. 4 (Fall, 1992), 2-11.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York, Verso, 1997). Denning does not include art museums in his analysis.

more clearly define a national American aesthetic. The FAP had five divisions: Murals, Easel Painting, Sculpture, Graphic Arts, and the Index of American Design. Cahill and those who worked for him considered it their mission to “develop a broad base for a living national art.”<sup>72</sup>

Cahill was an experienced art museum administrator, so it is interesting to consider why he did not directly include art museums in the New Deal national projects. Perhaps he was only too aware of the elite constituencies that art museums had to serve and wanted to create arts programs less directed towards the expert or connoisseur and more directed towards general public needs and interests.<sup>73</sup> Cahill undoubtedly wanted to create an innovative government program that would bypass art museums and go directly to the people. Although Cahill had been an outspoken critic of government art projects in the past, his ideas drew attention to the lack of national culture and he was able to design a major program for the arts that addressed various shortcomings that he saw. Although Cahill’s FAP programs for the arts were innovative, they were also exclusionary. FAP programs extended the arts throughout America but also exposed biases, prejudices, and social inequities.

The most visible FAP projects were murals for public buildings. They usually had historic themes that had to be acceptable to the local communities. Competent artists were assigned to these projects and this generally meant white, male artists from elsewhere who had been professionally trained. Competitions for projects were awarded by locally elected juries with the approval of government administrators in charge of particular sections by media. There was

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<sup>72</sup> Olin Dows, “The New Deal’s Treasury Art Program: A Memoir” in Francis V. O’Connor, ed. *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1972) 11-49.

<sup>73</sup> See A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and Isadora Anderson Helfgott, *Framing the Audience: Art and the Politics of Culture in the United States 1929-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

general recognition among them that art in America was at an unsophisticated level and needed to be developed.<sup>74</sup> Government strictures on FAP projects coupled with segregation in the arts and definitions of who constituted a competent artist meant that by definition the participants were restricted to white male artists with arts training. If citizens of towns and cities did not like the style or content of the histories that artists proposed, they could reject the projects. WPA artists might have a different political vision than their intended audiences.<sup>75</sup>

Most public murals projects were expected to be narrative and naturalistic and be based on a limited subject matter restricted to local histories, homegrown industries, or distinctive regional landscapes. The Harlem Hospital Mural project was an important attempt by African-American artist Charles Alston to provide a progressive “Negro” history however white hospital administrators criticized the work “for containing too much Negro subject matter.”<sup>76</sup> Harlem was a major African-American urban center in New York. Alston and his assistants had prepared a racially egalitarian presentation of black culture demonstrating progressivism and equality in medicine. Their proposal fell on the heels of a series of racist hiring policies at the hospital and white supervisors vehemently disagreed with Alston’s vision. Though the attempts

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<sup>74</sup> Dows, 1972, 11-12.

<sup>75</sup> Even the more professional FAP artists could occupy different ends of the political spectrum. There were white regional artists and white or black social realists artists that were assigned to work on WPA projects. Regionalist painters such as Grant Wood or Thomas Benton painted more idealized or romanticized images of American life while social realists such as Ben Shahn or Philip Levine had a humanitarian-Marxist leaning and tended to paint in more realistic styles that revealed social injustices or progressive ideas. See Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 446-7.

<sup>76</sup> Diana Linden and Larry Greene, “Charles Alston’s Harlem Hospital Murals: Cultural Politics in Depression Era Harlem,” *Prospects* 26 (October 2001), 391-421.

of hospital administrators to cancel the commission were unsuccessful, it still took five years for Alston to obtain final approval of the mural plan.

Other FAP projects were dedicated to defining just what should constitute an indigenous folk art in America. The FAP also needed to find work for older or less talented artist-copyists needing economic relief. One of its programs was the compilation of an Index of American Design with the goal to reveal a “pure” American culture.<sup>77</sup> Copyists were trained to realistically illustrate “authentic” examples of local folk-arts chosen by an Index Committee. To maintain quality control their work was supervised and directed by artists employed by the government.

Works to be illustrated in the Index were chosen from the holdings of private New York collectors and brought to special worksites at the Brooklyn Museum, the Met, the Museum of the City of New York, or the New York Historical Society, though occasionally copyists worked from photographs. Copyists would work in watercolor according to certain regulations that assured a homogeneous appearance. A committee of supervisors scrutinized all illustrations for factual, accurate rendering before adding a completed work to the Index.<sup>78</sup>

The Index sought a uniform vision of what it defined as “pure American craftsmanship” and “genuine spontaneous American creativity” but did not incorporate European-inspired arts nor did it include the material culture of marginal groups such as American Indians or African-

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<sup>77</sup> Produced between 1935 and 1942, the Index of American Design reflects a regional modernist vision of the time. It consists of over 22,000 watercolor renderings of what were then considered to be examples of “pure” American decorative regional arts from the colonial period through the nineteenth century.

<sup>78</sup> Lincoln Rothschild, “The Index of American Design of the WPA Federal Art Project” in Francis V. O’Connor, ed. *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1972), 177-222.

Americans.<sup>79</sup> Indian art was not included because “it should be left to ethnologists who had been making pictorial records.”<sup>80</sup> However, no comments were ever made to explain why African-American arts were not included, though Zora Neale Hurston and Alain Locke had been long-advocates for incorporating a more creative “Negro aesthetic sensibility into less inventive European immigrant art.”<sup>81</sup>

Thus, though this national arts project was intended to establish unity and define a national American folk art, it skewed national representation and constituted a hegemonic version of a selective, “authentically” white American regional history that was folk-based, nostalgic, and idealized.<sup>82</sup> Index administrators vigorously pursued publicity for their project in the 1930’s and sent out exhibitions of Index renderings, further promoting a limited, homogenous view of pure American folk traditions.<sup>83</sup>

The FAP also helped create over one hundred “community art centers” that operated separately from established art museums.<sup>84</sup> Several of these centers were intended to help black communities in Harlem, Chicago, St. Louis, and Oklahoma City but most of them were in

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<sup>79</sup> Francis P. Hornung, *Treasury of American Design: A Pictorial Survey of Popular Folk Art based on watercolor renderings in the Index of American Design* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1972) Volume 1, xxii.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey C. Stewart. *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 595.

<sup>82</sup> The same critique could be applied to an exhibition that Holger Cahill produced for the Museum of Modern Art in 1933 called “Art of the Common Man in America” that subsequently traveled to six major art museums in the U.S. and served as a prototype for folk art collections in American museums. See “Index of American Art,” <https://www.nga.gov/education/teachers/teaching.../index-american-design.html>

<sup>83</sup> At the end of the FAP, the Index was housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and it later became part of the collections National Gallery of Art in 1943. The Gallery sent out thematic exhibitions renderings to organizations upon request.

<sup>84</sup> See John Franklin White, *Art in Action: American Art Centers and the New Deal* (Chicago, Scarecrow Press, 1987).

white communities.<sup>85</sup> All community center programs were meant to address self-improvement and help individual communities get back on their feet.<sup>86</sup>

Community art centers were not museums. They were focused, hands-on places, where living artists and craftspeople made, exhibited, and educated local townspeople about the arts. They did not maintain permanent collections or generate exhibitions. Their purpose was to make it possible for the average man or woman to actively participate in the experience of creating or appreciating art.<sup>87</sup> In order to create such a center, a town simply needed to establish need and supply a suitable building and personnel to run the programs. The federal government then supported project costs, staff salaries, materials, and exhibitions so long as the program functioned.<sup>88</sup> To support the work of painters and graphic artists newly employed by the WPA, the federal government paid for their work and circulated exhibitions of their efforts to community centers. There was a temporary federal exhibitions office in Washington, D.C., run under the jurisdiction of administrator Mildred Holzhauer Baker that created and circulated art exhibitions of regional artists to community centers<sup>89</sup> According to Baker “by 1939 more than five hundred exhibitions were circulated to other towns by rail at the lowest possible rate.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the underlying pros and cons or racial assumptions about Negro community centers held by the FAP administration, see Saab, 2004, 58 ff.

<sup>87</sup> Parker, 1938, 807.

<sup>88</sup> White, 1987, 13.

<sup>89</sup> Mildred Holzhauer Baker, “Community Art Centers and Exhibitions.” In *Art in Action: American Art Centers and the New Deal* by John Franklin White. (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), 167-169. Once the FAP disbanded, towns were left on their own to pay for ongoing centers and many did not.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 168.

When the country's economic problems lessened in 1937, two Democratic congressmen authored what became known as the "Coffee-Pepper Bill," hoping to provide for a permanent federal Bureau of Fine Arts for the United States.<sup>91</sup> The Bill was controversial for various reasons. According to historian Victorian Grieve, the crux of the debate was that the middlebrow or more populist view of the artist that had been advanced by FAP programs was at odds with those who believed in the more European-derived or highbrow concept of the elite artist as a solitary genius.<sup>92</sup> Politicians and artist groups were concerned not only about the cost of a permanent Bureau of Fine Arts but also about the limits such a government agency might place on the freedom of artists.<sup>93</sup> The so-called Coffee Pepper Bill was defeated in the House of Representatives by a vote of 195 to 35.<sup>94</sup>

By the end of the decade, the nation had recovered from the worst of the Great Depression, the MoMA was generating modern art exhibitions for the educated classes, and the remaining days of FAP were obviously numbered. President Roosevelt foresaw another potential problem with the nation's unemployed artists. With the aid of America's art museums he instituted a nationwide "Federal Art Week" in 1940 to help the economy and encourage Americans to buy low-cost artworks, thus providing a ready market for regional artists.<sup>95</sup> These

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<sup>91</sup> Representative John Main Coffee (D-WA) and Senator Claude Pepper (D-FL) collaborated on a bill to create a permanent government arts agency with separate departments for the five sections of art designated by FAP. The bill did not include all relief workers but only "competent" ones and provided for their transfer to the new bureau with future hires as finances allowed. The largest art organizations would supply names of artists and the President would appoint directors who would determine applicant eligibility and competence. Since unions then claimed the largest memberships among art organizations, they would have the most influence in the proposed bureau. The bill (HR 8239) was ultimately defeated in the House of Representatives by a vote of 195-35. See Grieve, 2009, 3-4. 166-72.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Grieve, 2009, 3-4.

<sup>95</sup> See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for a fuller discussion of National Arts Week.

activities were intended to reveal the nation's "useable past" and forge a "New Horizon in American Art."<sup>96</sup>

The government-sponsored arts of the 1930s attempted to create a new direction for American arts but the concept of a national art was very narrowly conceived in terms of specific subject matter, themes, and Anglo-American traditions. Practicing artists were segregated and there were limited opportunities for African-American artists. There was no new horizon that included African-American art or other ethnicities. Foreshadowing the early Cold War era described by Elaine Tyler May, race and class divisions were often covered in an aura of unity and harmony for the white middle class.<sup>97</sup> This situation would eventually require decades of post-war efforts by social critics and scholars to bring a more corrective narrative to the representation of other groups.

In summary, during the first few decades of the twentieth century, cultural leaders recognized the arts in America were lagging behind those of other nations. Wealthy individuals, civic museums, or philanthropic institutions were expected to develop and promote the arts. The federal government was dedicated to doing as little as possible for the visual arts until a situation became urgent or there was a political reason to become involved. During the Great Depression, there was temporary government funding to employ out-of-work artists and at the same time address the complicated question of what constituted art in America. World War II

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<sup>96</sup> *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915) a book by critic Van Wyck Brooks emphasizes the urgent need for America to find a "useable past" This book made a strong impact on America with its thesis that the Puritan duality that separated spiritual and money matters had resulted in a corresponding split in contemporary American culture between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" publics. In 1936, FAP administrator Holger Cahill repeated the argument for a useable past in *New Horizons For American Art*, 1936.

<sup>97</sup> Elaine Tyler May. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008) 8.



provided another reason for the government to become involved in the arts. As this dissertation will show, America's entrance into the war became the next urgency that motivated the federal government to become more involved with the arts.

## Historiography

Following intellectual trailblazers such as French philosopher Michel Foucault and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, researchers have examined the relationships between museums and power, the museum as a ritual setting, and as disciplinary institutions that have shaped public taste, behavior, social attitudes, and notions of citizenship and class.<sup>98</sup> The role of arts and culture in public affairs has also received greater emphasis since the cultural turn of the 1980s. Contributions that have influenced this dissertation have come from a variety of disciplines.

In *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938-1950*, political scientist Frank Ninkovich emphasizes the philanthropic origins of U.S. cultural policy in the early twentieth century and the primacy of national cultural dynamics over foreign policy.<sup>99</sup> He establishes how organizations like the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Rockefeller Foundation worked to promote mutual understanding and world peace through cultural interchange in the arts, asserting that such exchanges formed the basis for peaceful

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<sup>98</sup> See Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader: An Interpretation of Foucault's Thought* (New York, Penguin Books, 1991). For an overview of Bourdieu's ideas see Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), or Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>99</sup> Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-2.

international relations. In the 1930's philanthropic organizations were less able to take on the strategic needs of government. At the same time, rising statist philosophies of arts and culture from totalitarian nations such as Germany and Italy led to pressures for more active involvement in culture and the arts by U.S. art museums and the Department of State. A stronger U.S. arts presence in certain parts of the world became necessary and art museums stepped in to reinforce America's lagging arts reputation and create exhibitions that represented the government's point of view and a more aggressive type of wartime arts discourse. The government could not deploy exhibitions in support of foreign policy without the participation and expertise of American art museums and until a particular combination of events came together.

A second influence on this dissertation derives from *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* by political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson. This author defines the nation as "an imagined political community... both inherently limited and sovereign."<sup>100</sup> As cultural phenomena that are cognitively recognized and lived by populations, Anderson says nations must be collectively imagined and believed by its citizens as being real and finite. He believes that nations or political communities can be distinguished "by the style in which they are imagined" and these cognitive categories are aids for citizens "to think the nation."<sup>101</sup> He emphasizes the development of print language, religious or racial identity, and patriotism as essential prerequisites for nationalism and includes museums, census taking, and maps in his argument as ways for nations to legitimate themselves.

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<sup>100</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised edition. London: Verso, 2006), 6.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Although he does not discuss art museums or exhibitions, his ideas about nationalism explain the power of wartime exhibitions as public aids to “think the nation.”

A third influence on this dissertation derives from *Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, and Politics* by Tony Bennett, a sociologist specializing in cultural studies, who provides crucial insights on how museums assert official authority and influence through the “exhibitionary complex” or the disciplinary power of display.<sup>102</sup> For Bennett, exhibitions seek to win hearts and minds and discipline and train bodies. This concept is useful for explaining the impact high-visibility exhibitions can have on their audiences, particularly in times of war. Bennett argues that the effect the exhibitionary complex has on viewers derives from the visual spectacle of objects as well as attendant design theatrics or rhetorical devices that signal messages of affect, power, and knowledge.<sup>103</sup> Museums augment displays with “exhibitionary apparatuses” such as speeches, opening ceremonies, programs, catalogues, or other secondary discourses to reinforce their message and increase audiences. By providing visitors with a sense of awe obtained from “the politics of the invisible,” art museums can persuade populations by emphasizing pieces of the cultural puzzle that are not visually represented. They can provide visitors with a certain kind of overarching “gaze” or superior view from which to interpret an alien or foreign culture. Bennett’s ideas help explain the heightened power and the efficacy of MoMA and NGA art exhibitions just before and during World War II.

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<sup>102</sup> See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995). Carol Duncan’s *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995) is another groundbreaking study of art museums as sites of political power and ritual.

<sup>103</sup> Timothy Mitchell, in *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) even goes so far as to describe exhibitions as “colonizing entities.”

The approach of Melani McAlister, a professor of media studies who wrote *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, has been another influence.<sup>104</sup> McAlister examines the links between cultural representations, national identities, and U.S. foreign policy that helped make the cultures of the Middle East meaningful to Americans in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>105</sup> A centerpiece of her argument concerns the Tutankhamen exhibition that swept U.S. museums in 1973 and from 1977-79. She highlights the ancient culture of Egypt, with its long-time public fascination, against the backdrop of expanding U.S. interests, particularly in the commodities of religion and oil and points out how the Middle East has become central for African American cultural politics encouraging black audiences challenged the reading of Tutankhamen's tomb treasures as an allegory for oil.<sup>106</sup> McAlister's analysis emphasizes that large-scale cultural presentations like the 1973 Tutankhamen exhibition communicates different national and international messages, and how the politics of identity in the United States, although not solely an identity of the arts, moves with the changing cultural logic of American foreign policy.

Two kinds of cultural overviews have been useful for this analysis. The first consists survey-critiques focusing on the antipathy or indifference to the arts by the federal government.<sup>107</sup> These works have helped document the unresponsiveness of the federal government to the arts over time and explain a growing vacuum. The second type of overview consists of studies of federal art programs during the Great Depression that created attitudes

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<sup>104</sup> See Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 3: "King Tut, Commodity Nationalism, and the Politics of Oil, 1973-1979," 125-154.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-154.

<sup>107</sup> See Larson, 1983; Levy, 1997; Krenn, 2005; Kammen, 2006.

about the arts that were carried over into the 1940s. Authors such as Jonathan Harris, A. Joan Saab, and Victoria Grieve, Isadora Helfgott, and Sharon Musher have given analytical views of the cultural politics of federal arts projects of the 1930s.<sup>108</sup> In 1968 Francis V. O'Connor directed an NEA project that published memoirs commissioned from those who worked on New Deal art projects that has been especially helpful.<sup>109</sup> Works of Bridget R. Cooks and Mary Anne Calo have been especially helpful for understanding the exclusion of African-American artists and how social and economic conditions impeded their participation in art programs of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>110</sup>

Other works consulted for this dissertation are specific studies of major American art museums such as the MoMA, the NGA, and the Met.<sup>111</sup> Studies of later iconic exhibitions like “Advancing American Art” (1946), “Family of Man”(1955), and “Harlem on my Mind” (1969) have also been important, even when such projects have had negative public consequences.<sup>112</sup> Studying what happens when exhibitions go wrong, or why embryonic exhibitions become

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<sup>108</sup> Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Saab, 2004; Grieve 2009; Helfgott 2015; and Sharon Musher, *Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>109</sup> Francis V. O'Connor, ed., *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973).

<sup>110</sup> See Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011) and Calo, 2007.

<sup>111</sup> The MoMA literature is particularly vast. See Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Kristina Wilson, *The Modern Eye: Stieglitz, MoMA and the Art of the Exhibition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Also see Fink, 2007; David Edward Finley, *A Standard of Excellence: Andrew W. Mellon Founds the National Gallery of Art at Washington, D.C.* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973); John Walker, *National Gallery of Art Washington, D.C.* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1963?); David A. Doheny, *David Finley: Quiet Force for America's Arts* (Washington D.C., National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2006); and Calvin Tompkins, *Merchants & Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1989).

<sup>112</sup> See Cooks, 2011, 53-84; Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950's America*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995),

cancelled has also been illuminating.<sup>113</sup> Trade show exhibitions in the 1940's and 1950's as well as the "American National Exhibition in Moscow" (1959) have helped distinguish differences between government-controlled exhibitions and those that resulted from collaboration with art museums.<sup>114</sup> Loan exhibitions of foreign arts or patrimony on U.S. soil during this period have received relatively little scholarly attention, although presentations of the arts of Mexico are important exceptions.<sup>115</sup>

Two scholars have made important contributions explaining the American government's interest in using the arts to save democracy during and after World War II.<sup>116</sup> Lynn Nicholas's important book, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, underlines the cultural war that was being fought parallel to the military one during World War II. Cora Goldman's *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany* shows how U.S. government officials in occupied Berlin after the war and in competition with other occupying nations tried to use national arts and art exhibitions to promote beliefs in American democracy and redress Nazi effects on German public opinion.

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<sup>113</sup> See Krenn, 2005 and Kammen, 2006.

<sup>114</sup> See Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008); Andrew James Wulf, *U.S. International Exhibitions during the Cold War: Winning Hearts and Minds Through Cultural Diplomacy* (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); and M. S. Kushner, "Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959: Domestic Politics and Cultural Diplomacy" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1, 2002): 6-26.

<sup>115</sup> See for example Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Holly Barnett-Sanchez, "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art in the United States: Appropriations and Transformations of Heritage," 1933-1945" In *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, Elizabeth Hill Boone ed. (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C., 1993), 177-208.

<sup>116</sup> Important exceptions are Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York, Vintage Books, 1995) and Cora S. Goldman's *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

A final influence has been a body of scholars interested in studying the covert art activities of the CIA after World War II, and formulating discussions of the style of Abstract Expressionism as a blatant sign of American freedom.<sup>117</sup> Of these, Serge Guilbaut's analysis in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* is the most extensive. Arguing that Abstract Expressionism became a symbol of the American avant-garde during post-war economic restructuring, Guilbaut emphasizes how this compelling art style was put into service to demonstrate a democratic ideology of freedom for cultural leadership of the world. David Caute's *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* raises the interesting issue that during the early Cold War there was a general style contrast between America and the USSR and observes that abstraction in all types of art, including music and dance, became a symbol for American freedom and democracy. Other authors focusing on the CIA-Cold War contest such as Eva Cockcraft or Francis Stonor Saunders have limited their discussions to certain covert exhibition activities involving MoMA and the CIA. Though provocative, such observations are only a small fraction of the arts activity and these authors do not study the larger relationship between government and art museums just before and during World War II.

## **Methods and Assumptions**

This dissertation asserts the primacy of MoMA and NGA as institutional leaders in the mid-twentieth century United States. It advocates a close look at both institutions in the 1930s

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<sup>117</sup> These include: Eva Cockcraft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," *Art Forum* 15, no. 10 (June, 1974), 33-41; Jane de Hart Matthews, "Art and Politics in Cold War America," *The American Historical Review*, 81, no. 4 (October 1976): 762-789; Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983); Francis Stonor Saunders, *Cultural Cold War and the CIA* (New York, New York Press, 1999); and David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003).

and throughout World War II and aims to prove that the federal government gravitated towards both these museums during the war to project national and international discourse. While other U.S. museums may have contributed innovative arts ideas, it was the MoMA and NGA that had the power and resources to carry out their ideas on a national scale and serve as models for other U.S. art museums to follow.

The data that support this study draw heavily from MoMA and NGA, particularly from museum archives<sup>118</sup> Primary sources include exhibition files, personal records or papers, oral interviews with key individuals involved in exhibition development, exhibition listings, discourse about opening events and educational programs, catalogues, press releases, annual reports, and other in-house publications. Art journals and art reviews or reports in periodicals and newspapers are also used as evidence.

In analyzing exhibition labels, press releases, and catalogues it is important to be conscious of differences between “langue” and “parole,” that is to say, the langue or rhetorical high ideals of what individual museums say about themselves and their projects, versus the parole or what was more likely the actual reality of the situation on the ground as documented by media coverage or critical reviews.<sup>119</sup> Art museum rhetoric is often characterized by its own tone and content of idealism to drive home a point of moral high ground. When describing the

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<sup>118</sup> The dissertation excludes discussions of science and history museums not because they were unpatriotic but because these museums were more interested in factual accuracy and less interested in creative interpretation. During World War II, art museums were much more willing than science museums to adapt their exhibition themes to government ideology and/or if they thought they could gain wider audiences by going outside factual data and because art objects and art groupings were susceptible to multiple interpretations. See Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life 1876-1926* (1988); Cummings, 1940; and Clark Whissler, “Some Fundamentals in the Philosophy of Science Museums” *Museum News* XX, no. 16 (February 15, 1943).

<sup>119</sup> From French Structuralism, after F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by R. Harris, (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1986). Original work published 1972.



underlying stimulus or goals for an exhibition in catalogues or press releases, there is candor, but also an idealized overlay of interpretive language that is intended to entice. By rooting an exhibition more firmly in the specific historical context of the individuals and incidents that gave rise to it, it is possible to see the larger patterns of intentionality.

Art exhibitions are a collaborative type of art form, requiring many different individuals to come together for their creation and production. In the 1930's temporary exhibitions joined permanent collection building as an institutional focus and the art exhibition as an expressive and influential art form came into its own. Art museum personnel in major museums exhaustively worked to create temporary exhibitions that changed on a monthly basis to attract repeat audiences. At this time, high visibility art exhibitions with communicative messages became a political platform for many more stakeholders in America than before. Advertising, public relations, and business were important influences on museums and they borrowed marketing techniques from these sources to bring in audiences.<sup>120</sup>

Art Museums are in the business of representation. They go to a great deal of expense in time, effort, and resources and they take their work very seriously. Mid-century American art museums began to flex their power in an effort to influence society and develop constituencies; they were open to new techniques to expand their audiences in the 1930's and 1940's. Their boards and directors were eager to track attendance as a measure of exhibition success. For these reasons, the public voted with their feet and attendance numbers greatly influenced future exhibitions. The communicative power and prestige of art exhibitions was attractive to

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<sup>120</sup> See William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture 1890-1930* (New York: Vintage Books, 1944). See also Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

government, although for museums the line between propaganda and opinion sometimes became a precarious one to fathom.

At this time there emerged new collaborations that included prominent community, business, cultural, and government leaders who worked together to create wartime exhibitions. Influential politicians, museum board members, and prominent academics could catalyze, influence, or shape the content of art exhibitions. A shift took place in the conduct of the profession that encouraged museums to go outside the narrow purview of the arts specialist and bring in social commentators and charismatic individuals. The media was also an avid contributor to the process of driving art exhibitions, as “art beats” were covered by journalists. MoMA and NGA knew the power of media and sponsored art programs on radio to draw audiences in to see temporary exhibitions.<sup>121</sup> Museum staff took into account media reactions whenever possible and courted their favorable opinion.

Art exhibitions were audience-driven and almost like contests within the profession. They were watched by other museums and borrowed or replicated in kind. Both NGA and MoMA tracked exhibition attendance closely; the size of an exhibition audience was a measure of its success. If an exhibition was popular, it was noted in a press release and its successes were reiterated, either by the museum that created it or by another museum. If an exhibition lacked good attendance, its formula or subject matter was noted and not repeated.

What constituted audience in the minds of museum staff and elite people who had the power to create these exhibitions? Scholars who study the 1930s have noted that there was a strong push to bring “middlebrow” arts to average Americans or the common man and it is

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<sup>121</sup> W.B. Levenson. “Radio and the Museum. *The Museum News* XVIII, no 4 (June 15, 1941).

tempting to read these audiences as primarily white.<sup>122</sup> Museums then did not usually analyze their audiences specifically for elements of class, gender, age or ethnicity.<sup>123</sup> FAP exhibitions in community centers were intended for local, regional people in outlying areas, not in the big cities. Metropolitan museums certainly attracted more urban populations. Neighborhoods segregated by race and class were a given. MoMA was located on the west side of Manhattan and must have attracted a more upscale white clientele; Adjacent to the National Mall, NGA expected to serve all tax-paying Americans who had access to the capital and/or the means to travel there. It was especially attuned to a white, predominantly male, military audience during the war years.

Museum worlds are political places where charismatic individuals can easily demonstrate their influence. Personalities and actions of high-level individuals in museums and government such as Alfred Barr, Holger Cahill, Nelson Rockefeller, and David Finley are emphasized throughout this dissertation because these individuals had the power to determine the content of exhibitions and were able to maneuver within the flexibility of the institutional structure. This analysis also focuses on the interactions of people in power such as museum boards, directors, senior curators, politicians, or celebrities that that swayed institutional priorities and catalyzed changes in policies, methods of production, and exhibition narratives.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The term “middlebrow” applied by critics in the 1930s to popular culture came into widespread use when *Harper’s* magazine published a famous chart dividing Americans according to their tastes and pastimes into different levels of culture. See Grieve, 2009, 4-5.

<sup>123</sup> On some occasions they noted the ethnicity of an exhibition’s audience. When MoMA was disappointed so few members from Harlem attended their 1935 “African Negro Art” exhibition it took out an ad in *New York Age*, a black newspaper, inviting people to visit without fear or prejudice. Calo, 2007, 151.

<sup>124</sup> Although curators today play a prominent role in developing or creating major art exhibitions, in the 1930’s and 1940’s it was museum boards and directors who made the dominant decisions about high-visibility exhibitions that an obedient staff would then produce. Board members had the wealth, the connections, and the influence to

This dissertation also highlights how leaders and government agencies interfaced with art institutions and influenced the creation of certain types of exhibitions, rather than analyzing specific completed exhibitions. It illuminates why these collaborations occurred and how museum administrations and government officials communicated with one another to shape exhibitions over time. The research has not uncovered examples of overt pressure or coercion on art museums from the federal government to host politically motivated projects, yet there were subtle social pressures or political considerations that affected the development, production, and distribution of influential art exhibitions in wartime.

## **Chapter Outlines**

This study is divided into five chapters that examine the relationship of art museums and the federal government during World War II. Chapter One, “A Modern Identity for America: The First Decade of the Museum of Modern Art,” begins with the 1929 opening of MoMA, the first art museum in America devoted entirely to modern art. The chapter demonstrates how MoMA rose to national and international prominence by presenting provocative exhibitions of worldwide modern art. It demonstrates how MoMA’s exhibitions expanded the definition of modern art in America far beyond just the media of painting and sculptures and heightened the U.S. arts profile to make its artistic expression internationally competitive.

Chapter Two, “Old World Tradition and Excellence: The Wartime Origins of the National Gallery of Art,” begins with the impressive opening of NGA in the nation’s capital, just six

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direct museum activities. Many museum board members already had or were interested in developing stronger ties with government officials, using their museum connections to gain political favor.

months before the U.S. entry into World War II. This museum, very different in institutional style from MoMA, featured impressive galleries of European art of “classic elegance,” representing the pinnacle of timeless traditions and excellence in world arts. Located just steps away from the nation’s Capitol Building, NGA governed itself with largesse as “the people’s art museum.”<sup>125</sup> This chapter and the one before it represent the modern and classic poles of the U.S. national arts continuum. Together, the MoMA and the NGA provided important models for other U.S. art professionals who looked to them for traveling exhibitions and professional leadership.

With America’s entrance into World War II, art museum agendas throughout the country took on a strikingly new patriotic character. Chapter Three, “Enlisting the Arts: War Themed Exhibitions at NGA and MoMA,” shows how each museum and the federal government worked together to develop their own kinds of art exhibitions of war and diplomacy as a type of national discourse. The arts became a focus during the war through presidential endorsement and public acknowledgement of them as symbols of democratic freedom. This philosophy gave Americans a ready reply to the rhetorical question, “*What are we fighting for?*” as expression in the arts become equated with freedom.<sup>126</sup> The federal government relied upon NGA and MoMA more fully than other museums to promote “combat art exhibitions” and “exhibitions of wartime persuasion” because of their abundant resources, high visibility, and willingness to cooperate.

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<sup>125</sup> Finley, 1973, 103-4.

<sup>126</sup> On June 10, 1941 Herbert Agar, the Publisher of the *Louisville Courier Journal*, wrote a popular editorial for *PM* magazine called “What We Are Fighting For.” This phrase, the sub-title of this dissertation, became a common slogan during World War II.

Chapter Four, “Exhibitions of Diplomacy: Nelson Rockefeller and the Office of Inter-American Affairs,” focuses on the intensive participation of NGA and MoMA in the federal programs of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA). One purpose of this wartime agency was to promote art exhibitions of unity and goodwill between the U.S. and Latin America and thereby improve solidarity and security throughout the Western Hemisphere. Ancillary goals were to improve Latin America’s economic base, access its raw resources for the war industry, and use the arts to neutralize national stereotypes that misinformed and divided peoples of North and South America. Exhibitions fostered by the OCIAA became experiments in diplomacy that inspired other museums to initiate their own Latin American art exhibitions. They were an important influence on the State Department.

In Chapter Five, “Projecting U.S. Influence Abroad: The Roberts Commission and the Officers of the Monuments, Fine Arts, & Archives Program,” the dissertation moves from its emphasis on exhibitions to participation in the preservation and salvage activities of the Roberts Commission and the U.S. Army that deeply affected American museums.<sup>127</sup> The looting of European museums by Hitler, who considered the possession of certain artworks essential for justifying Aryan supremacy, threatened Western arts and the future of democracy in a free world. Working closely with American art museums and using NGA as a base of action, U.S. scholars and museum professionals defined priorities in European art and helped channel military actions and strategies to save as many monuments and artworks as possible. “Museum men” enlisted to become MFA&A officers, serving under the Civil Affairs and Military

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<sup>127</sup> There were two presidentially appointed commissions called “the Roberts Commission,” both chaired by Supreme Court Justice Roberts during World War II. This dissertation is concerned with the second Roberts Commission dedicated to protecting cultural resources in Europe during and after World War II.

Government sections of allied forces of the U.S. Army, and were tasked with saving European monuments and artworks from being confiscated or destroyed. The skills of art museum professionals in the trenches --to locate, identify, and protect fragile monuments during times of war-- were essential and appreciated by war-torn countries. MFA&A officers also became involved in “de-Nazifying” Germany after the war; to this end, they created art exhibitions in damaged European cities to reinforce local morale and promote democratic values.

Peacetime brought new challenges for America and its art museums. When MFA&A officers returned home, they were generally welcomed back with open arms into influential museum positions. They brought a new philosophy or worldview to the institution as a result of their war experiences. The aftermath of the war changed geopolitical boundaries, and gave rise to national diplomacy exhibitions that initially became tools for mending diplomatic breeches or reinforcing relationships with European allies and subsequently became strategies to unite with former adversaries such as Germany Japan, and Korea. Combat art exhibitions receded after the war, but focused theme shows of foreign “national arts” on U.S. soil signaling diplomatic relations continued to be popular in years to come, reinforcing America’s international image and providing a protective framework for citizens to experience “the foreign.”

With the end of World War II, the relationship between the federal government and art museums needed to adjust yet again. As a result of the war, museums had carved out a stronger national role for themselves and strengthened America’s stake and position in the world arts framework. World War II re-directed national art concerns, helped address America’s

long-standing “art problem,” and gave American art museums a heightened role in public diplomacy through generating art exhibitions with political uses.



## Chapter 1

### A “Modern” Identity for America: The First Decade of the Museum of Modern Art

The founders of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) envisioned it as a unique and sophisticated arts institution and the only museum in the nation dedicated to celebrating modern art. The museum rose during the Depression of the 1930’s, pushing the definition of modern art into new kinds of media and extending America’s aesthetic profile and diplomatic sophistication.

This chapter will describe some of the successes and failures of MoMA in its first decade, just before America’s entrance into World War II, and show how its unusual exhibition formulas and high visibility projected the U.S. art image onto higher national and international levels. As MoMA’s burgeoning exhibition program tapped into channels of national and international power and gained broad national attention, successes in the arts drew government interest and catapulted the museum into more political realms. During its first decade, MoMA’s charismatic, young Director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and its Board of Trustees made the museum into a dynamic and experimental model for other American art museums to follow and built an international reputation for the United States in artistic judgment and modern art expertise.

### Founding and Governance of MoMA

MoMA began through the initiative of three wealthy New York women with high social connections: Abigail Aldrich Rockefeller (Mrs. John D. Rockefeller), Lilly P. Bliss, and Mary Quinn Sullivan (Mrs. Cornelius Sullivan).<sup>1</sup> All were arts enthusiasts; their rationale for creating a

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<sup>1</sup> See Lynes, 1973, Chapter 1 for detailed information on the social history and founding of MoMA.

museum solely devoted to modern art was simply that they were astonished that America's most sophisticated city did not already have such an institution.<sup>2</sup> They thought that such project would be an exciting endeavor. It seemed inexcusable, even a national embarrassment, that a stylish city like New York lacked a major museum of modern art.<sup>3</sup>

Funding to create a new museum was not an issue. All three women had ample sources of independent wealth and abundant social contacts. They realized that any new museum needed a board of trustees and a male director. "Abby" Rockefeller took the lead by inviting Conger Goodyear, a respected military man and entrepreneur with some museum experience and considerable social standing, to guide them. Goodyear had previously been a trustee and president of the Board of the influential Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, but recently had a falling out with them because he had too greatly favored modern European art. Goodyear accepted the position of President of the MoMA Board of Trustees.<sup>4</sup>

After agreeing to serve on the founding board, Goodyear felt it prudent to ask Paul Sachs, the foremost "museum man" in the nation to join them.<sup>5</sup> Sachs taught a prestigious yearlong graduate level "Museum Course" at Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum. He was beginning to build a reputation as the top advisor for American museums and was actively working to promote professionalism in American art museums. His course was a prerequisite for directing any major museum in the U.S. and its graduates learned all about art connoisseurship and best

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<sup>2</sup> The Met had a policy of collecting world art up to, but not beyond, 1900. The art of contemporary or living artists was considered too new and risky for most art museums to collect.

<sup>3</sup> Lynes, 1973,13."The Museum of Non-Objective Painting" in New York, a forerunner to the "Guggenheim Museum," was not established in New York until 1939.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> "Museum man" was a common term for leaders in the profession; women were prominent support-staff in American museums and abundantly filled lower-level positions.

principles of elite museum administration.<sup>6</sup> Sachs readily consented to serve on the MoMA board.<sup>7</sup> Others possessing sufficient wealth and power were also invited to join.

In order to understand American art museums and the governance of the MoMA, it is necessary to briefly discuss the structural tensions that exist between museum boards and their directors and the inherent politics in the relationship.<sup>8</sup> Then, as now, most major museums operated under a board of directors or a group of governing trustees, but boards differ widely in the amount of power they wield.<sup>9</sup> Board members serve as “elite volunteers” and are not paid for their efforts. They enjoy art, often collect it, and are not themselves experts in museums, yet because of their money and status they rank far above the “hired help” or the working museum staff. Board membership entails the desire to serve the public, yet it is also an opportunity to flex and enhance personal influence. It is the board’s responsibility to authorize museum policy, hire key personnel, and insure the financial stability of the institution.<sup>10</sup>

Understanding the changing governance at MoMA is important for assessing how the institution grew. Museum boards can be weak or strong and every board is different. If a board is weak, it may function like a rubber-stamp for the director’s policies; if a board is strong, it may dominate the activities of the staff and its programs. A museum director serves as the conduit between the board and the museum staff, and is in fact considered to be the highest-

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<sup>6</sup> Duncan, 2001, 64. Paul Sachs was the son of the founders of the investment firm of Goldman Sachs and later became a partner. According to Duncan, Sachs developed his ideas for his yearlong museum course at Harvard from the mentoring influence of Henry Watson Kent at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>7</sup> Lynes 1973, 8-18.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh H. Genoways and Lynne M. Ireland, *Museum Administration: An Introduction* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>9</sup> See Goode, 1895 for the earliest museum guidelines.

<sup>10</sup> See Benjamin Ives Gilman, *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1918) for goals professed by the Harvard “Museum Course. See also Benjamin Ives Gilman, *Museum Ideals* (Cambridge, Mass, 1923), 11.

level staff member. A director often needs charm, intelligence, and tact to maneuver around the will of powerful board members and insure they will work in concert with his goals for the institution.<sup>11</sup>

Though MoMA's Board began small, it was composed of strong and enterprising individuals who identified closely with the City of New York and with its reputation for arts sophistication.<sup>12</sup> The next section will show how MoMA's innovative director actively shaped its institutional identity.

### **No Holds Barred: Alfred Barr and the Power of Special Exhibitions**

The search for MoMA's founding director was relatively swift and easy. Sachs recommended his prize student, a twenty-eight year old man named Alfred H. Barr Jr., an innovative scholar with teaching experience who did not himself come from family wealth or position. Barr was young and had no working experience in the museum profession, but he was brilliant, glib, and a rapid learner. He also had a zeal for modern art, a sixth sense about publicity, showmanship, and promotion, and was a connoisseur in modern European art having spent time closely observing art museums in select European cities. He was full of ideas and an energetic apostle for international modernism; his father and grandfather before him had both been preachers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lynes, 1973,18.

<sup>13</sup> Numerous authors have addressed the prodigious talents of Alfred H. Barr, Jr. For more background see Lynes, 1973, 19-33. Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr Jr: Missionary for the Modern* (New York, Contemporary Books, 1989); Margaret Scolari Barr, "Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Museum of Modern Art: a biographical chronicle of the years 1930-1944" *The New Criterion*, Summer 1987, 23-74; and Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

Barr, who had been teaching at Wellesley College, one of America's most widely respected private universities for women, was hired by the MoMA trustees with the understanding that he might need to work under Sachs's guidance to learn the ropes of museum directing.<sup>14</sup> With regard to board members, Sachs simply advised Barr "to follow the line of least resistance... to start with, and as you gain confidence the rest will follow."<sup>15</sup> Given Barr's high energy, intellectual pedigree, and arts sophistication, the trustees initially bowed to his knowledge and connoisseurship in matters of modern art, though they would soon become involved in the development of high-visibility exhibitions upon which the MoMA's reputation depended.<sup>16</sup>

One of Barr's first challenges as Director was to define exactly what he meant by modern art and to teach his board exactly what their new institution would mean by it.<sup>17</sup> He had definite ideas on the subject because he had taught it in his own arts curriculum at Wellesley.<sup>18</sup> For Barr, modern art was any "innovative historical style of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries or after that was progressive, challenging, original, and not safe."<sup>19</sup> Since MoMA had no permanent collections, loan exhibitions had to be its primary method of communication, announcing its institutional

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<sup>14</sup> A scrutiny of curriculum for the Museum Course does not show that Sachs considered trustees or museum boards as major topics of discussion or a subject for special treatment. The yearlong course essentially focused on practical problems in museum management and acquisition. See Duncan, 2001, 438.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>16</sup> The pace at which MoMA began was remarkable. The idea for MoMA began in early 1929; Goodyear came on board by the end of May; Barr was hired at the end of August. He had only two months to begin his directorship and organize two opening exhibitions on two floors of the existing Hecksher Building: "Cezanne, Gauguin Seurat mad Van Gogh" and "Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans."

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, 2013,160-1.

<sup>18</sup> Barr's definition of modern art was "a relative elastic term that serves continually to designate painting sculpture, moving pictures, architecture, and the lesser visual arts original and progressive in character, produced especially within the last three decades but including also 'pioneer ancestors' of the nineteenth century." Lynes, 1973, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Meyer 2013,193-4.

identity. Modern European art was Barr's specialty; it was where his strongest knowledge, personal interests, and contacts for securing loans could be found.<sup>20</sup>

Barr's ambitions for MoMA were lofty. He wanted to use special exhibitions as a way to present provocative ideas about world art through a modernist lens.<sup>21</sup> As an intellectual Barr strived to create exhibitions with scholarly import that were documented by pioneering catalogues.<sup>22</sup> He liked to revise outdated art historical categories, surprise people, and challenge public inertia about modern art. Both Barr and MoMA's Trustees measured exhibition success by paying careful attention to high attendance figures and by adjusting offerings of the exhibition program, according to public and critical response.<sup>23</sup>

Temporary loan exhibitions were the lifeblood of MoMA and the source of its institutional vitality and identity. Barr and his staff crafted a complex exhibition schedule with a balance of European, American, and various forms of new media art.<sup>24</sup> These were essentially the three broad categories of exhibitions that Barr and his staff juggled, hoping to please their board, the general public, and the press at large.

MoMA trustees watched the exhibition schedule closely and had the power to modify or change it, paying particular attention to high visibility exhibitions that took up the lion's share

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<sup>20</sup> Lynes, 1973, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ralph Alexander, "MoMA as Educator: The Legacy of Alfred H. Barr Jr." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39, no. 2 (2005): 97-103 Review of *Alfred H. Barr Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*; Sybil Kantor *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39 no.2 (2005): 97-103.

<sup>22</sup> "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition" (1932), "Machine Art" (1934), "Bauhaus: 1919-1928" (1939) are some examples of exhibitions.

<sup>23</sup> If an exhibition theme worked well with the public, it would be repeated, such as the "Useful Objects" series or solo exhibitions of renowned European artists.

<sup>24</sup> Barr's courses at Wellesley were multi-media and iconoclastic. His early exhibitions simply transferred much of his college curriculum and probing intellect into exhibition formats. His specialty at Wellesley had been "art of our time" and virtually anything could fit that rubric if properly presented to the public. New media art refers to artworks created with new media technologies. See also Scholari Barr, 1987, 23-74.

of the annual institutional budget.<sup>25</sup> There was a special trustee committee that scrutinized, and approved costly or important exhibitions. Under Barr's definition, virtually any type of art, period, or culture might be seen with a view to modernism and could be the focus for provocative interpretive questions.<sup>26</sup> Even non-Western arts could be seen in new ways.<sup>27</sup> Barr felt a responsibility to teach ordinary Americans how to improve their personal taste and appreciate modern art. He and the trustees were especially concerned with national and international audiences and with MoMA's institutional arts reputation and position in the art world.

Barr used MoMA's press releases to shape public opinion, writing the early ones himself until the trustees insisted on hiring their first public relations professional in 1933.<sup>28</sup> In his first release, Barr threw out a rather surprising gauntlet for New York.<sup>29</sup> After emphasizing the great need for a Museum of Modern Art in New York, he stated that the Met's relationship to MoMA would be a complimentary one, "like the Louvre's relationship to the Luxembourg."<sup>30</sup> He then declared, "The New York Museum of Modern Art will function during its first two years as a gallery for temporary loan exhibitions." Finally, he predicted that

Within ten years, New York with its vast wealth, its already magnificent private collections, and its enthusiastic but not [very] organized interest in modern art, could achieve the greatest modern museum in the world...Before these two years of temporary exhibitions are over it

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<sup>25</sup> Lynes, 1973, 80.

<sup>26</sup> The reader is referred to the extensive MoMA Exhibition History List 1929-present. [http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/achivves\\_exhibition\\_history\\_list#1950](http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/achivves_exhibition_history_list#1950)

<sup>27</sup> "Examples are "American Sources of Modern Art" (1933), "African Negro Art "(1935), "Persian Fresco Painting" (1932), "Prehistoric Rock Pictures"(1937), "Indian Art of the United States" (1941), and "Arts of the South Seas" (1946).

<sup>28</sup> "Publicity for Organization of Museum," August 1929, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. This appears to be a lengthy rough draft that Barr hurriedly typed up and sent to his staff to edit.

<sup>30</sup> The Musée de Luxembourg is an important museum of contemporary art in Paris.

should be possible to [discover] whether New York is really willing to build and support a great permanent Museum of Modern Art.<sup>31</sup>

How to present the work of living American artists was one of Barr's greatest challenges in the early years of MoMA.<sup>32</sup> There was probably no question in his mind that American painting and sculpture were less daring and innovative than European art, although he felt American artists had the capacity to improve.<sup>33</sup> The inaugural European exhibition at MoMA was popular. It was simply called "Cezanne, Gauguin, Seurat, Van Gogh." The exhibition immediately following it was "Paintings by 19 Living Americans."<sup>34</sup> In a press release dated January 14, 1930, responding to criticism of artists featured in the second exhibition, Barr noted, "The amount of controversy aroused by the choices of painters has proven the vital interest which New York takes in American Painting. The Museum looks forward to future exhibitions of work by Americans, confident that they will hold their own against European exhibitions."<sup>35</sup> Whether or not he fully believed this tactfully worded statement is unknown.

Barr wasn't alone in his reticence to judge American contemporary art. There were many arts connoisseurs and critics who felt that much of American painting was inferior or derivative of European art and had a simplicity of vision.<sup>36</sup> There were, however, vocal American artists'

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<sup>31</sup> "Publicity for Organization of Museum," August 1929, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives>.

<sup>32</sup> Scolari Barr, 1987, 23-74. This is a personal diary by Alfred Barr's wife who served as interpreter for her husband in Europe.

<sup>33</sup> This was a commonly held belief among art connoisseurs and critics in America and Europe.

<sup>34</sup> "Paintings by 19 Living Americans," December 1929, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives>.

<sup>35</sup> January 14, 1930. Untitled Release, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives>.

<sup>36</sup> Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 318. See also Robert Hughes. *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), Chapter 6. See also *The Art News*. "Chicago Views the State of American Art in its Annual. 139, no. 6, (November 9, 1940), 9.



groups in New York, and trustees on the MoMA Board, including its Chairman Conger Goodyear and a founding Trustee and Benefactor Abby Rockefeller, who believed the museum should provide a strong representation of contemporary American painting and sculpture. Barr nevertheless remained wary of creating major exhibitions of contemporary American art himself and avoided showing American and European art side by side until 1939.<sup>37</sup> MoMA exhibitions before that time refrained from singling out any but the most classic or time-proven American painters in exhibition titles for shows.

Barr tried a daring tactic to improve and extend both the definition of art and the aesthetic profile of art in America. He turned to architecture and media other than painting such as films. The United States had drawn worldwide attention with its outstanding skyscrapers. Perhaps, by expanding the definition of American modernist art to include architecture and other art forms, a broader, more competitive selection of American art could prevail.

MoMA's exhibition programs of the 1930's indicate that Barr strived to emphasize the artistic qualities in a variety of media.<sup>38</sup> He began encouraging his staff to create exhibitions of American architecture, motion pictures, contemporary design, photography, and industrial arts. Under his directorship the MoMA experimented with a series of exhibitions emphasizing "Good American Design" or "Useful Objects." Barr developed an extraordinary 1934 exhibition called "Machine Art" with architect Philip Johnson in which

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<sup>37</sup> "Art in our Time: 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition" (1939) changed this practice.

<sup>38</sup> MoMA exhibitions from 1929 to the present are available on line, [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).

parts of industrial machines were shown as artworks, emphasizing the beauty of the American machine-age.<sup>39</sup>

MoMA didn't always originate ideas for exhibitions. It often borrowed innovative concepts tried by other institutions, added its own exhibition elements, and projected these ideas on a larger scale. For example, the concept for MoMA's "Machine Art" exhibition, actually originated with Jane Heap, editor of *The Little Review*, an avant-garde New York literary magazine that held a "machine-age exposition" in May 1927.<sup>40</sup> Heap had organized her innovative exhibition in cooperation with European artist and design groups but it didn't have wide visibility. Alfred Barr, saw the exhibition, took these ideas, added his own curators, and promoted MoMA's elaborate "Machine Art" exhibition that was acclaimed nationally.

Although "Machine Art" arguably fell within the category of "American Art," MoMA was under continuous public pressure to maintain a program of living American painters. To address this need, Barr utilized his assistant curator Dorothy Caning Miller who was married to Americanist and FAP arts administrator Holger Cahill.<sup>41</sup> Miller organized a series of small exhibitions featuring the works of grouped American artists. The titles of these shows, always designated by a number, such as "Fifteen Americans" or "Twelve Americans," deliberately

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<sup>39</sup> Museum of Modern Art, *Machine Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1934). Philip Johnson was an influential American architect who founded MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design in 1930.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, 2009, 159-83

<sup>41</sup> Between 1932-33, Cahill served as acting director of the MoMA when Alfred Barr took a leave of absence. During that time Cahill organized several notable exhibitions including *American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Inca)*, *American Folk Art: Art of the Common Man in America* and a survey exhibition, *American Painting and Sculpture 1862-1932*. *American Sources of Modern Art* was an exhibition of 200 archaeological objects from pre-Hispanic primitive cultures primarily drawn from East Coast museums suggesting that modernism could be an incipient human trait.

Cahill served as administrator of the Federal Art Project (FAP) from 1935-1943. In 1936 he and his wife, curator Dorothy Miller produced a large American paintings show called "New Horizons for American Art FAP" for MoMA.

avoided calling attention to the work of any single artist. The series promoted American artistry in general by massing artists in groups. In this way, MoMA hoped no one could criticize it for ignoring the country's living artists or say that the museum was uninterested in American painting, but it was often giving out mixed messages or left-handed compliments about American artists in choosing how it did or did not cover them.

### **A Racial Underside of Modernism**

MoMA did not regularly get involved in promoting exhibitions of non-white artists but its shows could have racial implications. The museum dedicated two exhibitions to African American artists in the 1930's and a third one called "African Negro Art," that linked African art to European primitivism.<sup>42</sup>

In 1937, MoMA mounted a show called "Sculpture by William Edmondson." The press release described Edmondson as a self-taught modern primitive living isolated in Tennessee. It called him a "simple old Negro" who received the call of God and saw religious visions that he depicted in his carvings.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps it was Edmondson's futuristic visions that placed him in the category of modern, or the fact that MoMA was interested in emphasizing that elements of modernism could be found in unexpected or humble locations. The Edmondson show was unfortunately presented adjacent to a more elaborate futuristic art exhibition called "The Town

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<sup>42</sup> Barr's definition of modernism only allowed him to acknowledge "African Negro Art" as an influence on modernism. MoMA Curator James Johnson Sweeney curated the exhibition; the press release noted, "Modern art in several of its phases has been much influenced by primitive African Art." Untitled press release March 18, 1935, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press>

<sup>43</sup> Untitled press release, October 1944, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press>. The exhibition did not have a catalogue.

of Tomorrow: 1937 and 1927” that encouraged viewers to compare it to past and future designs by noted European artists. The pairing “distanced Edmonson’s poor Negro world from the modern and futuristic qualities of avant-garde design” in a way that seemed disparaging.<sup>44</sup>

In 1944, MoMA mounted African-American “Paintings by Jacob Lawrence” consisting of sixty paintings from his “Migration Series” that MoMA had jointly purchased with the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington, D.C. plus several examples of Lawrence’s “combat art” watercolors showing scenes of integration in the military. The paintings had an abstract style and racially grounded subject matter yet Barr described Lawrence as a “primitive modern.”<sup>45</sup> The adjective “primitive” either assigned Lawrence to a category of inequality or to an earlier stage of development of modernism, neither of which were particularly complementary.

When Edward Keppel of the powerful Carnegie Corporation asked Barr’s opinion on a project the Corporation was considering that put Negro works in tandem with mainstream European and American Art, Barr did not endorse it. In response to a query from Keppel asking his opinion, Barr replied: “My conclusion is that a book of carefully chosen works by American Negroes would have some interest and for Negroes especially in schools and colleges, but the Negro theme in European and American art might well be omitted.”<sup>46</sup> Barr had identified African Negro Art as an influence on modernism but believed African-American art by living artists did not venture beyond providing a sociological function to the world of art.

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<sup>44</sup> Cooks, 2011, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. The exhibition did not have a catalogue.

<sup>46</sup> Rudolph Alexander Kofi Cain, *Alain Leroy Locke: Race, Culture and the Education of African American Adults* (New York: Amsterdam, 2003), 60. Letter from Alfred Barr to F.P. Keppel, 23 November 1938, Carnegie Corporation Grant Files, Series #1, Columbia University Library.

While key MoMA board members may have wanted to push the arts of living American artists more to the forefront, attendance figures for European exhibitions throughout the 1930's strongly gravitated towards European art.<sup>47</sup> The "Van Gogh shows" of 1935 broke all records of previous exhibition attendance and exhibitions of other famous European artists also did very well.<sup>48</sup> MoMA couldn't help depending on big-name European artists to bring in the crowds.

Yet, for its time, MoMA's exhibition offerings were something of a smorgasbord, offering something for everyone with multiple exhibitions characterized by variety, innovation, and surprise. Besides European shows featuring big-name artists, such as Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Honoré Daumier or Pablo Picasso, MoMA featured exhibitions of tried-and-true older American painters rather than modern ones, such as James McNeill Whistler, Winslow Homer, George Caleb Bingham, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Thomas Eakins. MoMA also tackled new and culturally challenging categories such as "German Art," "Cubism and Abstract Art," "Persian Fresco Painting," African Negro Art," and "Prehistoric Rock Pictures" from Europe and Africa.<sup>49</sup>

MoMA exhibitions were innovative although by today's standards they excluded important segments of the population and inadvertently perpetuated harmful stereotypes. "Art of the Common Man in America" (1932) is an example of an exhibition intended to call

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<sup>47</sup> Between 1932-8 Board of Trustees Chairman Conger Goodyear lobbied for Barr to create a mega-exhibition of American art to send to Paris. The project, "Three Centuries of American Art" was finally realized at the end of the decade and will be discussed in a separate section later in this chapter,

<sup>48</sup> "Van Gogh Exhibit Has Drawn Record Breaking Attendance," December 6, 1935, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives>.

<sup>49</sup> "African Negro Art" consisted of tribally attributed sculptures from West Africa; MoMA admired them for their modernist qualities.

attention to the neglected art form now designated as “folk art.” The exhibition was deliberately paired with “Exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture 1862-1932” and the press release for both exhibitions promised visitors would see “a comprehensive presentation of America’s contribution to Art, both in its conventional and unconventional aspects.”<sup>50</sup> Virtually all of the artists were from majority white cultural backgrounds and there was a strong Anglo-Saxon influence. The exhibition traveled to six U.S. cities after its New York opening and in the process influenced directors and curators making future judgments on ethnicity and gender in art and excluding artists of color and gender. While it applied the generic category of folk art in America for the first time, it emphasized American regionalism, encouraged homogeneity and stereotyping, and limited the definition of who in America could create folk art.

### **Something for Everyone**

MoMA exhibitions were intended to appeal to audiences of all ages, the subjects were surprising and wide-ranging and there were multiple kinds of exhibitions that one could see in a single visit.<sup>51</sup> Installations were lavish and had an intimate viewer appeal and personal style about them that were also echoed in text panels or membership magazine articles.<sup>52</sup> Displays were experimental and designed to emphasize viewer aesthetic impact. Exhibition layouts featured personal comfort and intimacy. Labels encouraged encounters with the art and

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<sup>50</sup> Untitled release for “Art of the Common Man in America,” November 30, 1932, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions>

<sup>51</sup> Exhibitions changed with great frequency, usually lasting a month’s duration.

<sup>52</sup> Staniszewski 1998 is a comprehensive and well-illustrated study of MoMA exhibition installations.

aesthetic contemplation.<sup>53</sup> MoMA's membership magazine provided chatty or personal, behind-the-scene features of how its exhibitions were developed.

MoMA's engaging relationship with its audience and close interest in visitor feedback or public opinion were unusual for major museums at that time but also very much a part of the contemporary advertising mode that appealed to people who wanted to improve personal appearance, knowledge, or ability.<sup>54</sup> MoMA's kaleidoscope of exhibition offerings --large, medium, and small-- changed rapidly and encouraged repeat visits by New Yorkers. The nearly ninety exhibitions MoMA churned out in the 1930's to keep visitor interest high and attendance up averaged out to about ten exhibitions per year. Other "exhibition-driven museums" began to pick up the pace on installations, keeping much of their staff in a permanently exhausted condition.

MoMA's temporary exhibition program made a major impact on art museums throughout America and signaled to its mainstream audiences that modern art was not only a source of entertainment and enlightenment but also a means of an elevating personal status and "thinking outside the box." The following exhibition, one of MoMA's most innovative, is an example of its global vision and standing.

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<sup>53</sup> Wilson, 2009, 94.

<sup>54</sup> Saab, 2004,87, discusses these features at length in Chapter 3: "Democracy in Design." She calls it "the pedagogy of cultural consumption" and describes the active role that American consumers played to create a democratic aesthetic and locate cultural capital in MoMA museum experiences.

## **“Modern Architecture: International Exhibition”**

“Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,”(1932) was an outstanding exhibition that catapulted America’s international arts reputation.<sup>55</sup> The fact that it was documented in nineteen curatorial files and twelve press releases proves its institutional importance to MoMA.<sup>56</sup> Coming just three years after MoMA began, it is a premier example of an innovative scholarly exhibition that looked at American art in a new way and boldly compared it to European by extending it into the medium of architecture.<sup>57</sup> By focusing on an unexpected subject in an area in which America could compete internationally, Barr was able to orchestrate a pioneering exhibition that asserted America’s artistic status by favorably comparing it to the architecture of other nations.<sup>58</sup>

Barr was responsible for the general concept of the exhibition, which was intended to be both scholarly and popular. Not being an expert in architecture himself, he brought in guest curators to help with the project.<sup>59</sup> The title may not appear exciting in retrospect, but for Barr and his curators it was carefully selected and deliberate. Their strategy was to define a new “International Style” of architecture and put America’s most talented architects at the center. This was MoMA’s major exhibition for 1932.<sup>60</sup> A national magazine commented “Under the

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<sup>55</sup> Museum of Modern Art, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, Arno Press reprint, 1969).

<sup>56</sup> MoMA Exhibition Records: Modern Architecture International Exhibition (MoMA Exhibition # 15) The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, “International Style: The MoMA Exhibition” *Progressive Architecture*. 63, (February 1982): 89-93.

<sup>58</sup> Lynes, 1973, 86-8

<sup>59</sup> MoMA characteristically chose American experts or guest-curators as a method to more carefully control the message of the exhibition.

<sup>60</sup> All information about the organization and trustee review procedures about this exhibition was obtained from MoMA Exhibition Records: Modern Architecture International Exhibition (MoMA Exhibition # 15) The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



ardent leadership of Philip Johnson, the fresh and vital currents of new thought in the architectural life of Europe and America are being directed toward the Modern Museum...and this will lead to a truly definitive and properly American form.”<sup>61</sup>

Since so much was at stake, MoMA’s trustees were closely involved with monitoring the development of the exhibition and they required regular reporting from the staff. Philip Johnson served as the in-house spokesperson for the project, writing detailed memoranda describing adjustments and rationales for decisions. The staff even mounted a preliminary exhibition called “Rejected Architects” inside a storefront opposite Carnegie Hall to function as an outlet for public commentary in advance of the exhibition proper.<sup>62</sup> The exhibition was expensive to produce, so much so that the MoMA Trustees had to become patrons of the exhibition.<sup>63</sup>

The main curator, Philip Johnson, was an influential American architect who had climbed the inner ranks of MoMA’s Junior Advisory Committee and would found of the first Department of Architecture and Design in an American museum in 1932 at MoMA.<sup>64</sup> The other guest curator, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr. was a seasoned, nationally renowned architectural historian at Smith College whom Barr had known at Harvard.<sup>65</sup> Lewis Mumford, a prominent

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<sup>61</sup> *Art News* 32 (April 1933), 54.

<sup>62</sup> Baharak Tabibi. “Exhibitions as the Medium of Architectural Reproduction: Modern Architecture International Exhibition,” PhD diss., Department of Architecture: Middle East Technical University, 2005. <https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12606077/index.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Lynes, 1973, 87, quotes the exhibition cost at \$66,000.

<sup>64</sup> MoMA’s Junior Advisory Committee was organized in 1930, It consisted of bright young men of social prominence and was a kind of preparatory school for potential board members. See John Elderfield, ed, *Philip Johnson and the Museum of Modern Art* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Lynes, 1973, 85

American historian-critic and popular author, was a third authority asked to contribute. He was known for his theoretical studies of world cities and his engaging public dialogues.<sup>66</sup>

Barr and his team singled out fifty world architects including America's Frank Lloyd Wright and European notables such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier.<sup>67</sup> MoMA was, in essence, judging the architecture of nations of the world, exercising a kind of artistic "American exceptionalism." Because buildings or parts of buildings could not themselves be exhibited, MoMA was able to work independently of various nations and did not need to negotiate object loans to substantiate curatorial judgment. The exhibition used compelling photographs, models, and texts by Americans to drive home its points. It consisted of ten elaborate architecture models -- five from the U.S. and five from Europe-- and seventy-five large-scale photographic images. The curators had the audacity to exclude famed European architect Walter Gropius and put American architect Frank Lloyd Wright in his place, although Wright objected strenuously to being part of any group.<sup>68</sup>

The installation was organized into three levels: 1) Presentation of nine world-renown architects from the U.S., Germany, and France, 2) Connections between architecture and industry, and 3) Architectural projects from worldwide competitions.<sup>69</sup> The exhibition classified architecture by nation, citing achievements and pitting American architects against European counterparts, covering fifteen nations and fifty individual architects.<sup>70</sup> Public comments about

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Wojtowicz, *Mumford On Modern Art in the 1930's* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2007), 1. Mumford is known for his architectural criticism but less well known for his criticism of art.

<sup>67</sup> "Le Corbusier" was the pseudonym of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret.

<sup>68</sup> Too much of an American individualist, Wright did not like being identified with a generalized International Style. Tabibi, 2005, unpaginated.

<sup>69</sup> Descriptions of the exhibition are all taken from the exhibition catalogue and Press Releases and Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>70</sup> The fifteen nations Barr and his curators highlighted were Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, England, Finland,

the exhibition were invited; visitors were encouraged to write their personal opinions about the exhibition upon exiting.<sup>71</sup> The display was visually intriguing with its emphasis on stark, modern architecture devoid of embellishment. Over 33,000 people came to see it because of its controversial character, enhanced by the bold questioning of journalists: “Do you call this architecture?”<sup>72</sup>

To extend the exhibition’s reach and longevity, a pictorial two hundred-page catalogue served as permanent documentation.<sup>73</sup> It featured an essay by Lewis Mumford that emphasized housing issues in the U.S. This was a built-in practical application to advance the study of housing problems throughout the world since improved mass housing was a pressing issue for many countries as well as the United States.<sup>74</sup>

To expand the exhibition’s accessibility, various sized versions of it were duplicated and offered to different museums. These traveled throughout the United States for the unusually long period of seven years.<sup>75</sup> This was MoMA’s first traveling exhibition; its new Department of Circulating Exhibitions, which opened in 1933, handled all the administrative arrangements, and was responsible for suggesting installation techniques to participating museums.

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France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Japan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Soviet Union and the United States.

<sup>71</sup> Tabibi, 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Lynes, 1973, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Museum of Modern Art, 1934.

<sup>74</sup> Terrence Riley, *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art* (New York, Rizzoli, 1992).

<sup>75</sup> The exhibition venues were Pennsylvania Art Museum, Seattle Art Museum, De Young Museum (San Francisco), Los Angeles Museum, Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, Cleveland Museum of Art, Toledo Museum of Art, Cincinnati Art Museum, Milwaukee Art Museum, Fog Art Museum (Harvard), Pittsburg Carnegie Institute, St. Paul Institute, Rochester Memorial Art Museum, Worcester Art Museum, Art Institute of Omaha, Houston Museum of Fine Art. It also went onto one Department store: Bullocks Wilshire, in Los Angeles.

One of the most provocative aspects of the exhibition was that an American museum and its cadre of U.S. scholars presumed to judge international modern architecture. Though the exhibition title was a bit academic, it did comprise two major forces that Barr and his colleagues wanted to define and fuse: Modern Architecture and International Style. International style was an architecture style that had developed in Europe and in the United States in the 1920's and 1930's. It was a style that represented an industrialized society, comprised of materials consisting of iron, steel, reinforced concrete and glass.<sup>76</sup> The term "International Style" had not been used before; Hitchcock and Johnson first coined it in their seminal essay for the MoMA catalogue.<sup>77</sup> For an art museum to define a new academic art category represented the pinnacle of abilities of the museum profession, caused attention in worldwide academic circles, and even changed architectural education in the U.S.<sup>78</sup>

The exhibition promoted connections between U.S. arts and the international building industry by listing the names of architects and companies in its catalogue. It led to public debates on international architecture, and encouraged collaboration within the field by listing architects and their access cities and showing and illustrating many images of building details.<sup>79</sup> The exhibition was so influential it even inspired publishing magnate Henry Luce in 1932 to purchase a then obscure trade journal called *Architectural Forum*. He gave it a picture-book

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<sup>76</sup> Gabriel Gossel, *Functional Architecture 1925-1940* (Berlin: Taschen, 1990).

<sup>77</sup> Museum of Modern Art, 1934.

<sup>78</sup> Tabibi, 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

magazine format that followed in the steps of *Life* magazine, which Luce purchased in 1930 after he had purchased *Time* (1923) and *Fortune* (1929).<sup>80</sup>

“Modern Architecture” was an early example of MoMA’s innovative approach to scholarly exhibitions, many aspects of which were to be repeated in the future. It demonstrated the power of exhibitions and proved to MoMA’s trustees and other curators that was possible to choose new and unexpected topics, display them in unusual ways, and put America at the center. These strategies were enhanced by asking provocative questions about the subject, designing innovative and eye-catching installations, bringing in outside experts or celebrities to substantiate claims, and inviting public dialogue. The project influenced practicing architects and led to discourse on international architecture and debates that might not have otherwise happened. Though average Americans might not understand every academic nuance, they were proud to know that the U.S. was finally ranked in an art arena in which it could compete. The exhibition press release announced that President Hoover and members of the President’s Conference on Home Ownership and Home Building were invited to the New York opening, adding political clout to the project.<sup>81</sup>

“Modern Architecture” was successful at repositioning American architecture at the top of an international framework.<sup>82</sup> Architecture was now a legitimate art area where America could internationally compete. The catalogue defined a new hierarchy of national artistry: It put architecture of Germany, Holland, France, and the United States on the top rank; Switzerland,

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<sup>80</sup> After the success of *Architectural Forum* became evident, various “shelter magazines” would take off in America during the Cold War.

<sup>81</sup> “Modern Architecture International Exhibition,” January 16-17, 1932, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

<sup>82</sup> Wilson, 1982, 89.

Czechoslovakia, Belgium, and German architects working in Russia on the second rank; and Italy, Spain, England and Japan on the lowest ranks of countries where modern architecture had only just begun to appear. American scholars were defining a new style and judging the contributions of nations.

Despite the success of the exhibition and its intellectual acclaim, a museum's reputation is only as good as its next project. MoMA still faced tremendous demands from its viewing public; its Trustees were insatiable, and though Barr had completely exhausted himself by producing "Modern Architecture" and was told to take a year's leave by the Trustees, they continued to demand that he send them his ideas for exciting modern art exhibitions from Europe where he went on sabbatical.<sup>83</sup> During the year Barr was away the Board asked Holger Cahill to serve as MoMA's Acting Director, thus giving MoMA an interim director who had expertise in modern American art. Trustees such as Abby Rockefeller and Conger Goodyear who were partial to American art were pleased to have a director with this type of expertise at the helm and hopefully guiding the MoMA exhibition more towards exhibitions of American art.<sup>84</sup>

"Modern Architecture" heightened both MoMA and America's international art profile and signaled MoMA's interest in modern art as a worldwide phenomenon. One extraordinary benefit of the presentation was that it lifted MoMA's influence beyond the national level and insisted that American architects could take their place next to those of Europe. MoMA would

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<sup>83</sup> Scolari Barr, 1987, 28.

<sup>84</sup> While Cahill was MoMA Acting Director he curated "Art of the Common Man in America" (1933). All but two of the works were drawn from the collection of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Cahill's influence on the MoMA program had a major effect in perpetuating the government's mainstream vision of what constituted American art.

still have to cater to national tastes and public expectations but a new international bar had been raised in the area of museum scholarship.

### **MoMA's Traveling Exhibition Programs**

Attendance figures and media coverage continued to be all-important to MoMA's Board and Director. Rising statistics signaled that art exhibitions were more popular as entertainment in New York. MoMA was becoming a style-leader for other art museums and there was a trickle-down effect as museums influenced each other and shared ideas.

Art exhibitions seemed to satisfy the growing demands of mainstream consumers; with them came the promise of visual pleasure, education, increased social status, and self-improvement which were key values for Americans in the 1930's.<sup>85</sup> It is tempting to view MoMA's exhibitions through the eyes of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as opportunities to visually consume art and improve American status and taste. By visiting a MoMA exhibition, a person's aesthetic cultural capital was enhanced.<sup>86</sup> Art exhibitions were relatively inexpensive, averaging about twenty-five cents per adult admission. Their value-added benefit enhanced any individual who bothered to take the time to see and be seen, to please family or spouse, and tell their friends about the experience.<sup>87</sup>

MoMA art exhibitions also appealed to home comforts and America's love for the new, the practical, and the unexpected. For example, "Useful Objects," MoMA's design series of

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<sup>85</sup> Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" in J.G. Richardson. *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986), 241-258.

<sup>87</sup> To increase attendance beyond its traditional adult female audience, MoMA began catering to families and adult males.

exhibitions promoting well-designed household goods, was a spin-off of the a segment of the 1934 “Machine Art.”<sup>88</sup> “Useful Object” exhibitions were repeated almost annually at MoMA throughout World War II.

Special exhibitions were by definition a time-limited commodity, a constantly shifting strategy that museums used to bring in repeat audiences. While it might exhaust museum staff to develop exhibitions from scratch with turn-around times approximately a month long, exhibitions brought people together. They provided connections among American cities, and moved in planned and predictable traveling circuits that created small networks of civic alliances. Special exhibitions offered catalogues and other kinds of merchandise for sale in museum shops. While “high art” might be for the elite, educational exhibitions at MoMA that combined aesthetic excellence, style, and public interest were something most ordinary Americans could afford and understand.

Circulating shows began to be a standard part of MoMA’s program in 1933, not because they made money for the museum but because museums and educational institutions outside of New York City were asking for MoMA exhibitions to come to their hometowns.<sup>89</sup> MoMA kept the costs for traveling exhibitions low; the Trustees assumed responsibility for half the cost of the exhibitions on the condition that participating institutions could raise the balance.<sup>90</sup>

Illustrated pamphlets were sent out to colleges and museums throughout the country featuring

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<sup>88</sup> These exhibitions are all examples of what Saab calls a “pedagogy of cultural consumption,” which linked the aesthetically informed purchase of selected industrial goods to a functioning democracy. “ See Saab, 2004, 10.

<sup>89</sup> MoMA had been aware of its educational responsibilities to the community as early as 1931 when Barr put together sixty color reproductions of objects and prepared an exhibition with commentary for a group of New York secondary schools called “A Brief Survey of Modern Painting.” It was so well received that a duplicate show was soon prepared that traveled for nine years.

<sup>90</sup> Museum of Modern Art, “Circulating Exhibitions 1931-1954” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 21, no. 3 (1954): 3-30.



package shows that were available. Certain museums in key cities like San Francisco, Chicago, or St. Louis were frequent subscribers because MoMA exhibitions relieved the workload of their staff and promised to bring in more visitors.<sup>91</sup>

MoMA specialized in taking its largest and most important shows and producing a variety of smaller duplicate versions of them to circulate to different parts of the country.<sup>92</sup> The circulating exhibition program continued to accelerate in the 1940's. If original works of art were too costly or fragile to pack and ship, then MoMA supplied high-quality color reproductions of artworks with accompanying explanatory labels and installation instructions. MoMA even circulated lightweight panels upon which color reproductions, photographs or diagrams could be mounted. These were teaching portfolios for classroom use with accompanying educational slide shows and text, all at affordable prices. A commercial art packing industry gradually grew at the same time as museum expertise in art handling and developed.

MoMA's circulating exhibition program undoubtedly did a great deal to standardize and improve public confidence and artistic taste. It created art conduits, connections, or alliances among major cities and set up a kind of civic competition. Art museums saw the advantage of partnering with museums from other cities in order to stretch their institutional resources, talents, and efficiency. Public outreach brought attention from important donors or funding

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<sup>91</sup> MoMA's Department of Circulating Exhibitions was officially established in 1933. Elodie Courter, a member of the museums' staff, was appointed Secretary of Circulating Exhibitions. By 1935 she played an active role in growing the department. By 1939, the roster of traveling exhibitions that MoMA offered became so large that Courter was named "Director of Circulating Exhibitions." See Roberta Smith, "Elodie Osborn, 82, First Director of the Modern's Traveling Shows" *The New York Times* (February 2, 1994).

<sup>92</sup> Exhibitions like "Machine Art," "Modern Architecture: International Style," "Van Gogh," "Whistler's Mother," "Art of the Common Man in America," "Ancestral Sources of Modern Painting," "Picasso," "Cubism and Abstract Art," and "Useful Objects for the Home" are some examples.

agencies and naturally pleased museum boards. Under this flourishing program, exhibition production became more streamlined; exhibitions could be prefabricated and packaged. MoMA invented improved methods to transport exhibition materials; art education was organized into manageable chunks. MoMA's staff made its displays accessible to broader audiences and circulating exhibitions could be adapted for specific audiences.<sup>93</sup> The program provided the structure to teach American museums and schools about art. It was self-sustaining, intimate, homegrown, and resulted in a product made from start to finish.

In 1939 MoMA received a five-year grant from The Rockefeller Foundation to help expand its traveling exhibition program that allowed it to reach an even wider audience.<sup>94</sup> MoMA's traveling exhibitions program extended its reach abroad in the next decade when it received a five-year grant from The Rockefeller Brothers Fund to create an International Program of Circulating Exhibitions.<sup>95</sup>

MoMA's traveling exhibition offerings became central to its responsibilities and mission as an art museum. Its staff took sections of larger exhibitions that had premiered in New York and adapted them for particular audiences, in effect creating smaller exhibitions out of larger ones.<sup>96</sup> Temporary exhibitions had been a central part of MoMA's identity since its beginning but the traveling art exhibition program became a kind of cottage industry unto itself. MoMA's

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<sup>93</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, "Circulating Exhibitions 1931-1954" *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*. 21 (3/4) 3-30, 1954.

<sup>94</sup> Tierney, Cristin. "A Stimulating Prospect: CAA's Traveling Exhibition Program 1929-1937" In *The Eye the Hand the Mind: 100 Years of the College Art Association*. Edited by Susan Ball The College Art Association: New York and Rutgers University Press 2011,33-39.

<sup>95</sup> The Rockefeller Brothers Fund was started in 1940 by the sons of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The grant for the International Program of Circulating Exhibitions was given in 1953.

<sup>96</sup> See Department of Circulating Exhibitions Records <http://www.moma.org/learn/resources>. There were also ample updates in the MoMA Bulletins on the profuse activities of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions. See for example "Circulating Exhibitions" *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 7, no. 5 (September 1940): 2-14.

traveling exhibitions became commodities that were creatively packaged and distributed. The term “packaged shows” is commonly in use today in art museums.

### **Promoting American Art in Paris: “Three Centuries of American Art”**

Pressured throughout the decade by trustees, artists, and critics to create a balanced program of American art, Barr tried to do his best for American artists, given his personal reservations and lack of expertise on the subject.<sup>97</sup> Goodyear was MoMA’s Chairman of the Board for over ten years. Since 1932 he had been lobbying Barr to create a major exhibition of American art for Paris, the world’s most important art center. Barr had refused repeatedly to do the exhibition, even offering to give up part of his salary to let someone else organize it.<sup>98</sup>

Negotiation problems with French government stalled Goodyear’s attempts when relations between the two countries were subsequently soured by an inter-allied debt left over from World War I.<sup>99</sup> Finally, in 1938, the French government relented and Goodyear assumed responsibility for organizing the show with MoMA Assistant Curator Dorothy Miller’s help.<sup>100</sup> The location the French chose for the exhibition was the *Jeu de Paume*, a public building in Paris that had originally housed royal tennis courts but was not yet an official museum. A summer time-slot was selected; a major national British exhibition and a Canadian one were scheduled in Paris at the same time, in competing museums.

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<sup>97</sup> Scolari Barr, 1987, 44.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> “The French debt to the United States” *Editorial research reports II* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1925) <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresre1925061700> (accessed August 9, 2018) *Congressional Quarterly*. “The French Debt to the United States.” 2018. *Library.cqpress.com*

<sup>100</sup> Lynes, 1973, 184. Dorothy Canning Miller did a series of important American Art exhibitions from the 1940’s through the 1960’s at MoMA.

The concept for the U.S. exhibition was “Three Centuries of American Art.”<sup>101</sup> The MoMA planned it as a large, multi-media exhibition with painting, sculpture, folk art, architecture, film, and photography. All MoMA curators and departments were involved in the preparation. The American share of the funds for the exhibition, which was the bulk of the annual budget, primarily came from trustees Abby Rockefeller and Conger Goodyear.<sup>102</sup> MoMA’s Board expected that the museum would be reimbursed for its expenses from sales of the catalogues and hoped that other venues for the exhibition could be arranged in various European cities.<sup>103</sup> The French government wanted MoMA to pay all expenses and divide all receipts equally from admissions and catalogue although this did not happen. This was MoMA’s first experience in dealing with a foreign government.

MoMA was responsible for the lion’s share of the work on the project. Its curators made the object selection and obtained all the loans; Alfred Barr agreed to direct the installation.<sup>104</sup> MoMA assumed the catalogue expenses and paid for all costs of insurance and transportation of objects.<sup>105</sup> The *Jeu de Paume* installation paid for guards, lighting, and other accessory

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<sup>101</sup> Information in this section was taken from MoMA Exhibition Records: 76a.6 *Jeu de Paume*, 76a.9 *French Critics*, and 76a.10 *Backstory Jeu de Paume*. Record <http://www.moma.org/learn/resources>

<sup>102</sup> Lynes, 1973. 187. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>103</sup> *Jeu de Paume* exhibition 76a.3 MoMA Exhibition Records. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>104</sup> The object selection, always subjective and conditional on availability of objects and the physical layout of the installation, is part of the exhibition’s “interpretive message” that MoMA’s curators to some extent controlled. Scholars from the United States supplied the catalogue content. No French authors were asked to contribute essays. Letter from Goodyear to Mrs. Rockefeller, June 22, 1938: MoMA exhibition Records 76a.6: The Museum of Modern Art Archives. See Department of Circulating Exhibitions /EAD/CEF.html

<sup>105</sup> Proposed contract sent to Conger Goodyear by Eustache de Lorey on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1937. MoMA Exhibition Records 76a.6. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

expenses. France was also charged with handling the publicity, which Goodyear later criticized as being minimal.<sup>106</sup>

Why was it so important for MoMA's Trustees to hold an exhibition of American art in Paris, the city widely acknowledged as the art capital of the world? Was it a way to test the power of MoMA to catapult American art on the international spectrum or to show that, at last, American art had arrived? It was obviously important to introduce American art to Europeans in the most prestigious locale possible. Why, then, did they settle for a secondary location like the *Jeu de Paume*? Perhaps the locale was offered at the last minute as a creative option. Possibly MoMA's board members were exhausted with unsatisfying negotiations with "French bureaucrats." There were also advance signs that the French were likely to be quite critical of traditional American art.<sup>107</sup>

The exhibition was a major attempt for MoMA to trumpet a new American arts identity, to let Paris rediscover a new and more sophisticated America through what was hoped to be a premier exhibition. But many factors intervened and this did not happen. French officials failed to give the exhibition proper publicity and an unexpected visit of the British King and Queen Consort to France upstaged the American showing. The *Jeu de Paume* was anything but a high-status location for French citizenry to enter, so it did not signal any particular prominence to the exhibition or status for attending. Two competing national exhibitions scheduled at the

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<sup>106</sup> Letter from Conger Goodyear to Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, June 22, 1938, MoMA Exhibition Records 76a.6. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>107</sup> MoMA Exhibition Records 76a.6: *Jeu de Paume*. Undated letter from Conger Goodyear to Mrs. Rockefeller: "we knew the French would not like our painting and sculpture much." The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

same time, British and Canadian, had greater attendance than “Three Centuries of American Art.”

For whatever reason, attendance for the show was embarrassingly scant; the galleries were nearly empty throughout its run. Very few people saw the presentation that MoMA’s staff had so carefully installed. Predictably, the French art critics were very hard on American painting and sculpture, although they did seem somewhat impressed with the architecture, photography, and film.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the disappointing French media coverage and attendance for “Three Centuries of American Art” in Paris, there was no time to lose at home. MoMA was about to celebrate its ten-year anniversary as well as open a new building on Manhattan’s West Side. It was also the year of the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Perhaps “Three Centuries” had been a useful dry run for MoMA despite its lackluster Paris attendance. It had given the museum a taste of what it was like to negotiate with a foreign government, and it had shown that the staff could work together on a complicated exhibition.

Barr and the Trustees began to plan another enormous exhibition of American art called “Art in Our Time.” This exhibition was first shown at the 1939 World’s Fair and then it was incorporated into a complete reinstallation of MoMA’s collections in the new building. “Art in Our Time” consisted of over four hundred loans of combined American and European artworks

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<sup>108</sup>There are many negative reviews in MoMA Exhibition Records 76a.9 “French Critics” file, The Museum of Modern Art Archives. Negative critical commentary by the French critics undoubtedly had its effect on poor attendance. There was also a major show of British art featured at the *Musée du Louvre* at the same time that probably distracted public interest.

and was documented by an enormous catalogue of three hundred and eighty-four pages.<sup>109</sup> All of these events were intended to demonstrate that MoMA had indeed come of age, and that American artists had come closer to holding their own with European artists.

### **The Ascendancy of Nelson Rockefeller**

Nelson Rockefeller was a determined and powerful individual born into one of America's wealthiest families.<sup>110</sup> Under his mother's direction, Rockefeller rose through the ranks of MoMA's administration, gradually learning the ropes about art, politics, and museum governance. By 1934, at age twenty-six, he had become chairman of three of MoMA's most important governing committees: Finance, Endowment, and Nominating. He was a talented administrator and gifted fundraiser who had a knack for promotion; no one had worked harder to raise funds for MoMA's endowment than Nelson Rockefeller.<sup>111</sup> After college he became active on MoMA's Board while at the same time managing his father's ownership of Rockefeller Center.

As early as 1936, MoMA had been planning a grand new building to be unveiled on its ten-year anniversary. That year Rockefeller persuaded his father, John D. Rockefeller, to donate

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<sup>109</sup> Museum of Modern Art. *Art in Our Time: An Exhibition to Celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art and the Opening of its New Building held at the time of the New York World's Fair* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1939).

<sup>110</sup>For extensive background on Nelson Rockefeller, see Cary Reich, *The Life of Nelson A. Rockefeller: Worlds to Conquer 1908-1958* (Doubleday, New York, 1996) and Richard Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller* (Random House, New York, 2014).

<sup>111</sup> Reich, 1996,145.

prime property on West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street for MoMA's future permanent home. In addition to the donation of land, the Rockefeller family had pledged to fund 60% of the new building.<sup>112</sup>

A new museum building has great potential for trumpeting a strong institutional style, and the choice of a chief architect is usually the first step in planning a new museum. Barr made his recommendations clear to the Board: in his opinion the choice of a world-class, European architect such as Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe was essential.

The MoMA building committee was composed of three people: its Chairman Nelson Rockefeller, Trustee Philip Goodwin who was an American architect, and Alfred Barr. While Barr was away in Europe during the summer of 1936—a season when important meetings were usually not held—two members of the committee chose to act without its third member. Rockefeller and Goodwin met and elected Goodwin as chief architect. Goodwin chose Edward Stone, another American, as his junior architect.<sup>113</sup>

Barr was stunned when he received notification of the decision, by mail through a third party.<sup>114</sup> He had been planning to personally approach his proposed European choices while he was abroad.<sup>115</sup> Instead, the decision had been made in his absence. Working frantically from Europe, he tried to turn the decision around, protesting Goodwin's conservative *Beaux Arts* tendencies and confiding that he was sure that if plans went ahead MoMA would get a

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 148. Despite his wife's passion, John D. Rockefeller personally disliked modern or American art and did not advocate collecting either. See Bernice Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: the Woman in the Family* (New York: Random House, 2003).

<sup>113</sup> Lynes, 1973,190-1.

<sup>114</sup> A senior staff member, not a trustee, told him of the decision.

<sup>115</sup> Rona Roob. "The Museum Selects an Architect: Excerpts from the Barr Papers of the Museum of Modern Art." *Archives of American Art Journal* 23, no.1 (1983), 22-30.



mediocre building that would be a huge embarrassment to the institution and to him.<sup>116</sup> He tried through lengthy correspondence to persuade various Trustees to reverse their decision but the committee refused to reconsider.<sup>117</sup>

The choice of Goodwin and Stone signaled a strong institutional stance that favored American style over European.<sup>118</sup> Barr's correspondence suggests that for his part he was convinced that an "American architect" was not ready and that a prestigious European choice was best.<sup>119</sup> Yet the Board's decision prevailed. MoMA's new building in American-International style would communicate a major message to all who entered it and constitute a great source of pride to American national identity. It would also be a major signal to European architects that America was putting its own architecture at the forefront and that international modern art had a competitor in the U.S.

Barr returned to New York at the end of the summer of 1936, recognizing that he had lost the fight for chief architect. He nevertheless continued to juggle a series of complicated exhibitions that had important repercussions for America's international art image at the end of the decade. Meanwhile, Nelson Rockefeller continued to develop his own ideas about how MoMA should be governed. The Trustees had requested outside evaluations of MoMA, such as the Blackburn and Packard reports, earlier in the decade; these had demonstrated that MoMA's

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 25-7.

<sup>117</sup> Reich 1996,148. Barr wrote anguished letters to Goodwin, Goodyear, and Abby Rockefeller. See Alfred Barr Papers, Roll 2165.Archives of American Art.

<sup>118</sup> Barr considered the trustees' position "nationalistic." Roob, 1983, 25.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 27.

activities needed to be better managed and that the museum should follow a more logical and less burgeoning mode of growth.<sup>120</sup>

In early 1939 Nelson Rockefeller and Anna Rosenberg, his key political advisor and public relation's expert who had personal connections to President Roosevelt, worked behind the scenes to plan opening ceremonies for the new building. Ten days in advance of the broadcast, Nelson Rockefeller sent suggested remarks to key speakers "to insure that the program would be coherent and interesting to the general public."<sup>121</sup> Speakers included Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia; Edsel Ford, a MoMA Trustee who spoke on modern design in industry; Walt Disney who spoke from Hollywood on American motion pictures; Robert Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, who spoke on the MoMA's national influence in education; and Edward Bruce, Director of the Fine Arts Section of the U.S. Treasury Department as the federal government's official representative. Lowell Thomas, a famous American radio commentator, hosted the program.<sup>122</sup>

Nelson Rockefeller and Anna Rosenberg masterminded much of the program.<sup>123</sup> Rockefeller had sent suggested remarks to most of the participants.<sup>124</sup> He also wrote to Stephen Earley who was responsible for White House public relations, saying that he hoped "to

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<sup>120</sup> Series I, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Correspondence: Museum of Modern Art 1929-1945, "A Report on the Development of the Museum of Modern Art: Introduction and General Considerations, 1935-36" Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>121</sup> Nelson A. Rockefeller Personal Projects, Record Group 4, Museum of Modern Art New Building, Opening May 10, 1939. III 4L Box 127. Folder 1238. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>122</sup> "President Roosevelt Speaks on Program Inaugurating New Building of Museum of Modern Art." April 27 or April 28, 1939 <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

<sup>123</sup> Nelson A. Rockefeller Personal Projects. Record Group 4 Museum of Modern Art New Building. Opening May 10, 1939, III 4L Box 127, Folder 1238. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>124</sup> Museum of Modern Art New Building, Opening May 10, 1939. III 4L Box 127 Folder 1238, Rockefeller Archive Center.

receive a draft of the President's speech prior to the program in order that we may eliminate from the rest of the program any duplication of his ideas or remarks."<sup>125</sup>

The theme of the opening program was cultural freedom.<sup>126</sup> Rockefeller had first approached Eleanor Roosevelt so that she would influence the President, writing "the very future of Western culture in Europe is at stake... and from now on it is going to be more and more up to the United States to carry on the tradition of freedom in art."<sup>127</sup> He went on at length to emphasize that the MoMA building "will be dedicated to the cause of peace and to the sanctity of free institutions. Only where men are free can the arts flourish and the civilization of national culture reach full flower. In the creation and enjoyment of beautiful things we are furthering democracy itself. That's why a museum is a citadel of civilization."<sup>128</sup>

President Roosevelt's fifteen minutes of remarks were taken almost verbatim from the ideas Rockefeller had penned to Eleanor Roosevelt.<sup>129</sup> They were delivered from the White House at the climax of the opening ceremony. The program started around 10:00 p.m. E.D.S.T and was accessible to listeners on the west coast at 7:00 p.m.

The inauguration of the new six-story, glass-walled, two million dollar building on May 9, 1939 was carefully coordinated to open ten days after the opening of the New York 1939 World's Fair. Nelson Rockefeller's high-level connections and calculations led to the participation of President Roosevelt. Rockefeller and the MoMA staff perfected Roosevelt's

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> "President Roosevelt Speaks on Program Inaugurating New Building of Museum of Modern Art." April 27 or April 28, 1939, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

<sup>127</sup> Museum of Modern Art New Building, Opening May 10, 1939. III 41. Box 127, Folder 1238, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>128</sup> Cultural Interests 1934-1941, III2E, 20. Letter from Nelson Rockefeller to Eleanor Roosevelt. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

dedication speech and the president consented to deliver it.<sup>130</sup> It signaled important new arts directives to the nation from the President that would have a major effect not only at the moment of their delivery but an added longevity through extensive documentation when reprinted in press releases, newspaper articles, professional journals and popular magazines. Leaving nothing to chance, Rockefeller prepared a series of talking points for himself and the MoMA staff to use with the press that he circulated in advance.<sup>131</sup>

President Roosevelt stated that the new MoMA is “dedicated to the cause of peace” because “the arts can only flourish in an atmosphere of peace and free institutions.” He emphasized that “the conditions for Art [sic] and democracy are one and the same” and traveling art exhibitions are an essential part of the Museum’s work so that “the gap between the artists and American industry and the great American public can be bridged.”<sup>132</sup>

The President spoke on the importance of improving public taste: “The standards of American taste will inevitably be raised by bringing into far-flung communities the results of the finest achievements in the arts. Proposed traveling exhibitions will make all of our people increasingly aware of the enormous importance of contemporary industrial design, architecture, social housing, photography, and other media. Thus a nationwide public will receive a demonstration of the force and scope of all the branches of the visual arts.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Museum of Modern Art New Building, Opening May 10, 1939. III 41, Box 127 Folder 1238, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>131</sup> Italian Masters Exhibition, Nelson A. Rockefeller, Personal. III 4LBox 137, Folder 1349. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>132</sup> Museum of Modern Art New Building Opening May 10, 1939. III 4L Box 127, Folder 1238. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>133</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt “Radio Dedication of the Museum of Modern Art,” New York City, May 10, 1939. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15761>.

The earlier federal arts programs of the 1930's had a democratizing effect, but Roosevelt's emphatic articulation of the nation's art policy in 1939, heralding the power of exhibitions and art in American culture, gave another jolt to all who listened. The President's remarks elevated the work of cultural leaders and museum staff. Anyone interested in the arts recognized this was yet another step for America to take in acknowledging the national importance of the arts, as the nation looked with concern towards violence in Europe. The Spanish Civil War was raging, Stalin's Great Purge was ongoing, and Hitler had annexed Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia in 1938. World War II would not officially begin until September. These were troubled times. Perhaps the arts did have major connections with world peace; certainly the beginnings of war would begin to force this issue. Could major exhibitions of world arts help stretch the ties of mutual understanding and smooth over disruptive cultural differences? Nelson Rockefeller definitely believed this was possible.

On Monday, May 8, 1940, at a meeting of the MoMA Board of Trustees, Nelson Rockefeller was elected President and Conger Goodyear quietly retired.<sup>134</sup> Though Rockefeller had been careful to give Barr credit for his "extraordinary taste and background in the field of art [that has] been from the beginning the guiding force of the Museum," the ascendancy of Rockefeller as a MoMA Trustee and President did a great deal to lessen or eclipse the influence of Alfred Barr as Director.<sup>135</sup> Barr had greatly disliked the opening program, privately criticizing it for being undignified and jocular, likening most of it to "a screw-ball radio script."<sup>136</sup> Neither

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<sup>134</sup> "Nelson Rockefeller Becomes New President of Museum of Modern Art," May 8 or 9, 1939, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>New Building. III4L Box 127Folder1234. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Goodyear nor the architects had received any credit for the new building in any of the building's inaugural speeches. Rockefeller defended himself later by saying it was not intended to be a memorial to individuals and to have changed the program thusly would have denied its public appeal.<sup>137</sup>

Rockefeller had actually been calling for outside evaluators for MoMA since 1933 and was determined to streamline the MoMA's operations.<sup>138</sup> In the summer of 1939, while Barr was again in Europe, Rockefeller hired outside experts to reevaluate and restructure MoMA's staffing and make better sense of what he considered to be the freewheeling way it had been managed.<sup>139</sup> He subsequently fired key employees Francis Collins and Tom Mabry, forced the resignation of John McAndrew who was head of the Architecture Department, and promoted a former Rockefeller employee, Monroe Wheeler, to the new Director of Publications.<sup>140</sup> It seems that making changes during the summers when Barr was away and unable to interfere in trustee matters was becoming a regular practice at the MoMA, and something that an exhausted Alfred Barr could not prevent.

With the opening of its new building, MoMA placed itself in a preeminent national position, catapulted itself ahead of all other U.S. museums, and drew more attention to America's international arts presence. In assuming the office of MoMA president in May 1940, Rockefeller would soon preside over two major international exhibitions that reinforced both MoMA and New York as centers of international arts. These exhibitions were an early indication

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<sup>137</sup> MOMA Opening of New Building, 1939 NAR Orchestrates Opening of MoMA, File: Museum of Modern Art: New Building III4L Box 127, Folder1234. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>138</sup> Reich, 1996, 150

<sup>139</sup> Lynes, 1973, 321-2.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 224.

for Rockefeller that MoMA and the arts could be a stepping-stone for international diplomatic connections and help place the U.S. closer to the center of world arts and cultural affairs.

The first exhibition, “Italian Masters” was a major group of loans that had been initially sent by the Royal Government of Italy to be shown at the 1939 San Francisco World’s Fair. A second direction-changing exhibition for MoMA, held that same year, was “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art,” a massive loan of Mexican national patrimony and a project near and dear to the Rockefeller family oil interests.<sup>141</sup>

### **“Italian Masters” and “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art”**

Alfred Barr’s concept of modern art could be applied to many parts of the world and sent MoMA’s art rationale in myriad directions. The two exhibitions that MoMA presented on the arts of Italy and Mexico marked a new step in international cultural relationships for U.S. museums. Both of them were a bit of a stretch to be termed “modern art.”

Despite the fact that “Italian Masters” contained hallowed works of art from the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods from the 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Barr and the Trustees ultimately found a “modern” justification for them.<sup>142</sup> The more logical place for the exhibition would, of course, have been the Metropolitan Museum of Art. However, the Met had declined to host it.<sup>143</sup> Though the exhibition contained fewer than thirty works of art, its phenomenal weight

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<sup>141</sup> Exhibition dates are “Italian Masters” (January 26-April 7, 1940); “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art” (May 15-September 30, 1940). Neither exhibition traveled after their New York venues.

<sup>142</sup> Italian Masters: III 4L Box 137 Folder 1349, Italian Masters Exhibition. Nelson A. Rockefeller, Personal. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>143</sup> The Met was in between directors when the exhibition was offered to them. Acting Director of the Met, William Ivans and his board declined to hold the show, given the high rental fees.

including massive sculptures, heralded in a press release, indicated that visitors would certainly be getting their money's worth.<sup>144</sup>

The timing of the exhibition is of political interest. In 1939 Italy was a constitutional monarchy with a fascist dictatorship. This was evidently not considered a problem in some American quarters. The Italian Royal Government had generously lent a group of priceless artworks to the 1939 San Francisco World's Fair for public relations purposes.<sup>145</sup> The initial loans were negotiated by Walter Heil, a German who had become an American citizen and was in charge of European Art for the Fair as well as Director of two art museums in San Francisco. Obviously the Italian Government was greatly motivated by the positive international visibility it would receive at the Fair, and the U.S. federal government had not protested. Perhaps this demonstrates that the U.S. government did not then see art exhibitions as having political components.<sup>146</sup> A year or so later, there might have been more cause for concern.

To generate enthusiasm for the exhibition, an honorary committee was formed in New York.<sup>147</sup> It consisted of New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Royal Italian Ambassador Prince Ascanio Colona, the Commissioner Consul General of Italy, and several distinguished New York

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<sup>144</sup> Ten Tons of Art Arrive at the Museum of Modern Art." January 16,1940,"<https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

<sup>145</sup> Since the 1930's Mussolini had forced Italian museums to lend their priceless masterworks to other European nations to demonstrate Italy's national excellence and power. See Francis Haskell. *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 107.

<sup>146</sup> After presentation in San Francisco, Heil arranged for the Italian loans to be shown first at the Chicago Art Institute and then in New York. An Advisory Committee at MoMA had been concerned that the New York venue could incite American artists, lovers of modern art and other people to attack the MoMA but they were overridden. III 4L, Box 137, Folder 1349, Italian Masters Exhibition Nelson A. Rockefeller, Personal. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>147</sup> "Museum of Modern Art Opens Exhibition of Italian Masters and Exhibition of Modern Masters." January 26,1940, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>



academic and religious leaders. Nelson Rockefeller gave a lavish dinner honoring Italian foreign dignitaries on the eve of the opening.

The MoMA took many precautions to avoid being widely criticized for holding the exhibition, which demonstrates how sensitive the MoMA and perhaps other major museums were becoming to the reactions of negative press. The press release for “Italian Masters” began with a lengthy rationale for MoMA’s decision to present an important exhibition of that appeared to fall well outside of the parameters of modern art.<sup>148</sup> It explained that an agreement was signed with the Royal Italian Government “in order to give New York an opportunity to see the masterpieces before they are returned to Italy, where a law has recently been passed to prevent their ever leaving that country again.” The release stated: “We accepted the exhibition only after we were informed that the Metropolitan Museum of Art was not in the position to meet the requirements of the Italian Government.” It further stipulated: Our acceptance of this exhibition...does not indicate a change in the established policy of the Museum...Great masterpieces of art are not... bound by any period and the influence of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque traditions upon the modern artist is fundamental and continuous... The Museum will show simultaneously with the Italian masterpieces an exhibition of the work of some of the greatest modern artists of both the European and American schools.

The entire second floor of the Museum was devoted only to this exhibition and was guarded day and night.

A second press release re-announced the tandem exhibitions of Italian Masters and Modern American Masters. Assistant Curator Dorothy Miller clarified the connection:

Imaginary contests between the heroes of antiquity and their modern counterparts have always had a certain fascination. Here, within the Museum of Modern Art, some such trial

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<sup>148</sup>“Italian Masterpieces to be Shown at The Museum of Modern Art,” January 3, 1940, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

of strength may actually take place, for the Museum, believing in the power and quality of the modern artist, has not hesitated to accept the challenge made possible by its act of hospitality toward the Italian masters. Whichever side, the old or the new, seems to triumph, one fact is sure: the great indebtedness of the modern masters to the work of their ancestors of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque—a debt that is continually being paid not only by the explicit homage which modern artists so often offer to the past but by the ever changing illumination which the art of the living throws upon the art of the dead.<sup>149</sup>

Hopefully, this was an adroit explanation that would bridge the time gaps and satisfy would-be critics who charged MoMA was neglecting modern American art.

Alfred Barr's preface to the catalogue of "Italian Masters" further justified the exhibition's presence at MoMA.<sup>150</sup> He emphasized that this was certainly not the first instance MoMA had featured art from the past. Historic art exhibitions were justified at MoMA because the works they contained had only been fully recognized in recent years and modern artists were pioneers in this new appreciation. He also asserted that Italian masterworks were sources of three of the great traditions of European painting: Venetian, Florentine, and Optical Realism. To prove his point, he designed an elaborate flow chart of Italian painting and sculptures between 1300-1800, and added a chronology of contemporary men and events. This graphic was printed on the front and end papers of the catalogue to insure its prominence and telegraph a complex visual image. It was also made into a visual for the exhibition. The chart substantiated a direct link of Italian Masters to the modern era that viewers took in at a glance and was one more argument that the MoMA presented to allay criticism of overstepping its legitimate artistic boundaries.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Museum of Modern Art. *Italian Masters Lent by the Royal Italian Government*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1940).

Nelson Rockefeller orchestrated an elaborate opening radio program that was broadcast live from the galleries of the MoMA and featured an international connection with Italian radio.<sup>151</sup> The timing of the afternoon opening in New York corresponded to the 9:00 p.m. broadcast in Italy. The international program did not include celebrities. Instead it highlighted honorary committee members sponsoring the exhibition and prominent leaders in Italy and the United States.

Generally, in diplomatic affairs, the first and last speakers in a program are considered to be the most important. The Italian Ambassador to the U.S., Prince Ascanio Colona, opened the program. A trustee for the Royal Italian Government designated in charge of the artworks followed him. Next, a delegate of the Italian Ministry of Education spoke. Nelson Rockefeller as President of the MoMA made himself the final speaker of the program, a move that would not have been lost on elite listeners.<sup>152</sup>

At the end of its first month, MoMA sent out yet another press release. "Italian Masters" had had the largest attendance in the entire ten years of the museum's existence, breaking the previous record made the last day of the Vincent Van Gogh exhibition of January 5, 1936.<sup>153</sup> It even broke the attendance figures at the opening night of the new building on May 10, 1939.

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<sup>151</sup> Italian Masters: III 4L Box 137 Folder 1349, Italian Masters Exhibition. Nelson A. Rockefeller, Personal. Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>152</sup>"Museum of Modern Art Broadcasts to Italy at Opening Exhibition of Italian Masters." January 25, 1940, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

<sup>153</sup> "All Attendance Records Broken At Museum of Modern Art." February 5, 1940, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>.

The same release noted that New Yorkers were asked to vote on their preferred Italian artworks. The results of the first week's balloting had come as a total surprise, confounding staff forecasts. Alfred Barr stated:

The New York public is to be congratulated upon its good taste in casting its overwhelming majority vote for the painting "Paul III" ...a profound and subtle characterization of an austere old man, painted in somber colors with the greatest technical and esthetic reserve. Several experts have expressed their opinion to me that the Paul III is the greatest painting in the exhibition. That the popular vote should concur with the expert of these authorities by preferring the Titian to better known and more obviously attractive works seems to me really important evidence of the discriminating taste of the Museum's visitors.<sup>154</sup>

Americans placing themselves in a position of judging or assessing the art of other nations would become even more important for the U.S. after it entered World War II.<sup>155</sup>

At the close of "Italian Masters," Rockefeller was offered a decoration from the Italian government. He had been "miffed over "Alfred's anti-Fascist tendencies" and tried on various public occasions to smooth them over. The Italian government was grateful. Nevertheless, Rockefeller declined to take the decoration, recalling public protests over Charles Lindbergh's acceptance of a decoration from "the Nazi's" in 1938. Rockefeller asserted, "the MoMA stands for free development of cultural and spiritual matters in liberal democracy and the Italian Government stands for exactly the opposite."<sup>156</sup> But it was also clear that taking a decoration from the Italian government would simply not benefit him politically.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> See Chapter 5: Projecting America's Influence Abroad: A Specially Appointed Commission and the Officers of the Monuments Fine Arts & Archives Program

<sup>156</sup> Italian Masters Exhibition, Nelson A. Rockefeller, Personal Notes, III 4L Box 137, Folder 1349, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>157</sup> Italian Masters: III 4L Box 137 Folder 1349, Italian Masters Exhibition. Nelson A. Rockefeller, Personal. Rockefeller Archive Center.

“Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art” was the second direction-changing exhibition for MoMA that signaled art museum involvement in international diplomatic relations. Rockefeller made a trip to South America in October 1939, one leg of which involved stopping in Mexico. The purpose of this visit was to negotiate on behalf of the family oil business, which had just been had expropriated, as had all foreign oil companies. A senior MoMA staff member had alerted him that it might be possible to borrow a major exhibition from Mexico.<sup>158</sup> During the trip, Rockefeller personally negotiated this exhibition with the President of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas.

The following questions were at the forefront of Rockefeller’s mind during negotiations: “Is a country’s essence to be found in its natural or cultural resources or both? How much of these can be shared and/or imported?”<sup>159</sup> In the same memorandum to the file, Rockefeller recalled his conversations with Cárdenas, which had been cordial but had not changed Mexico’s position on oil expropriation. Rockefeller had hoped to negotiate the creation of a “joint holding company” for Mexico’s oil assets that would create a profit-sharing situation between Mexico and the U.S. in which Mexico would hold major power. Cárdenas responded that Mexico did not want the U.S. to own any part of Mexico. Expropriating foreign oil interests had helped eradicate Mexico’s feelings of inferiority since keeping those assets was a matter of

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<sup>158</sup> Before he lost his job, John McAndrew, Curator of the MoMA Architecture and Design Department had learned of a proposed French exhibition of Mexican art that had been cancelled while talking to Diego Rivera in 1939. He conveyed this information to Rockefeller. Anna Indych-Lopez, *Muralism Without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siquieros in the United States 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 163.

<sup>159</sup> “Present Status of the Mexican Oil Expropriation” 1938. III4E, Box 52, Folder 437 Rockefeller Archive Center. “Memorandum of conversation between General Lazaro Cárdenas, President of Mexico and Mr. Nelson A. Rockefeller in the presence of Mr. Walter Douglas, Iliquilpan, Michoacán, Mexico, October 14 and 15<sup>th</sup> 1939. These questions are penciled as Nelson Rockefeller’s handwritten remarks on the memorandum and show equivalencies between arts in archaeological wealth and a nations valued resources in oil, both of which derive from Mexican national soil.

national pride and self-respect for the Mexican people. The meeting closed with positive feelings on both sides. Rockefeller noted, “The President saw us off and said we should always know we have warm friends in Mexico.”<sup>160</sup>

Evidently a loan of a large Mexican national patrimony was arranged during the discussion because Rockefeller left Mexico with a contract specifying that leading Mexican archaeologist, Alfonso Caso, was Commissar General for the project.<sup>161</sup> This contract required refinement, so another agreement with the Mexican government, was expedited stipulating that expenses were to be divided equally between Mexico and the U.S. The exhibition, reconfigured for American audiences rather than French, had four sections: ancient, colonial, modern, and popular arts. Because sufficient numbers of Mexican popular arts from varied regions could not be borrowed in time for the exhibition, Rockefeller agreed to simply buy and donate these contemporary objects.<sup>162</sup>

It was unusual for MoMA to defer to a foreign country in the choice of objects, thematic messages, catalogue essays, and organization, which is what happened in the case of this exhibition. It may have been necessary because haste was needed to produce such a large exhibition and catalogue and only a few months remained in the administration of President Cárdenas.<sup>163</sup> The installation had to begin on MoMA premises by April 26 in order to be

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Exhibition Contract dated October 1939. Exhibition Records Box 106.5. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>162</sup> The “Popular Arts” collections did not become part of the MoMA collections. They were later given to the San Antonio Museum of Art and the Mexican Museum, San Francisco.

<sup>163</sup> Mexican national patrimony must be approved and lent during a given presidential administration. All works must be returned before the beginning of the next administration.

completed by the May 13 opening.<sup>164</sup> Since the conceptual foundations of the exhibition were already established by the French curator, it had appeared that very little work was required on the part of MoMA. In any case, if the President of Mexico was offering to loan his country's greatest treasures to the U.S, the MoMA should certainly be able to accommodate them. International relations between Mexico and the United States were at stake, particularly at a time when mutual relationships had soured over expropriations of oil interests.

Americans who identified as Anglo-American had considered Mexican Americans to be second-class citizens at least since the Mexican War. Cultural relations between the two countries had continued to decline during the Great Depression when the U.S. government sponsored a Mexican Repatriation Program deporting Mexican agricultural workers and others of Mexican descent that were accused of taking away American jobs. Later in the decade, the business community harbored tremendous resentment towards Mexico once its president nationalized Mexican oil and expropriated American oil interests, not fully compensating American businesses according to Secretary of State Cordell Hull.<sup>165</sup> This was not necessarily an optimal time to exhibit the arts of Mexico in the United States.

Although in theory the exhibition concept and plan for "Twenty Centuries" had already been defined, the project was still a long way from completion. The French curator from Paris had defined general parameters and made preliminary arrangements for an arts presentation

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<sup>164</sup> To contain the show, all MoMA galleries plus the outdoor sculpture garden were required and had to be de-installed.

<sup>165</sup> See Office of the Historian: Milestones: 1937-1945; Mexican Expropriation of Foreign Oil, 1938. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/mexican-oil> (accessed July 27, 2018) The Zoot Suit Riots that broke out between young Mexican-Americans/Latinos and white servicemen in Los Angeles, June, 1943 demonstrated even more animosity.

at the *Jeu de Paume*.<sup>166</sup> However, France was unable to hold the exhibition owing to wartime concerns for safety of the artworks.<sup>167</sup> Rockefeller and the Board had assumed that very little would be required on the part of MoMA to adapt and produce the embryonic exhibition for American audiences and that Mexican curators would do the bulk of the work.

Perhaps there were cultural misunderstandings. The exhibition as conceived needed major adjustments for American audiences and required sending senior MoMA administrator John E. “Dick” Abbott to Mexico for three months to expedite and coordinate all operations.<sup>168</sup> It also required the two-month presence of MoMA’s Director of Publications, Monroe Wheeler, in Mexico. Abbott and Wheeler agreed to a bilingual catalogue that consisted of essays by Mexican scholars only, no American authorities.<sup>169</sup> In seeking to climb yet another rung on its ladder of exhibition success, MoMA had created a high-pressure situation for itself. To insure that the project met its deadlines, the Trustees expended huge resources to bring over 5,000 objects from Mexico and get them rapidly installed.<sup>170</sup>

There were, of course, historic and political incentives to do the project. “Italian Masters” had been a huge success; the Trustees expected that “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art” would achieve similar acclaim. Roosevelt’s earlier “Good Neighbor Policy” towards Latin America and

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<sup>166</sup> The French saw Colonial Art as being of relatively little importance; this section and the “Popular Arts” section were both increased in the MoMA version. Both these areas of national patrimony would have been very important to Mexico’s self-image. Exhibition Records 106.8, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>167</sup> When Hitler invaded Poland in September 1940, France cancelled the exhibition.

<sup>168</sup> Abbott was Vice-President of the MoMA Art Film Library and would soon become Executive Vice President of MoMA. The Exhibition Records Box 106.5 in the MoMA Archives details the many problems Abbott faced with anti-American feeling, difficulties with strikes and unions, and the imminent change of presidents causing uncertainty in various government offices.

<sup>169</sup> Contributing renowned Mexican scholars and artists were Alfonso Caso, Manuel Toussaint, Roberto Montenegro, and Miguel Covarrubias.

<sup>170</sup> Lynes, 1973, 222.



his more recent Pan-American push for hemispheric unity were important political justifications. Moreover, to help compensate for mid-century uncertainty about the quality of indigenous art in the U.S., some intellectuals such as Cahill had been arguing that Mexican art should be seen as a “shared cultural legacy of The Americas.” This view provided a heightened artistic identity for America that would incorporate the U.S. art into Mexico’s larger and more prestigious artistic traditions.<sup>171</sup> For his part, Rockefeller contended that the exhibition would substantially improve U.S. foreign policy relations, noting, “This type of good will is not only of great value to the Museum itself but it is of the utmost importance from the point of view of the United States, particularly at this time.”<sup>172</sup>

Nelson Rockefeller was concerned about possible negative opinion and MoMA’s arts reputation being muddied by involvement in political affairs. His instructions to Abbott emphasized:

Publicity from MoMA should tactfully stress that the exhibition is of an entirely cultural nature and has nothing to do with political or economic relations between our two countries. We want to make it clear to the public that the Museum initiated the exhibition because of the quality and importance of the art of Mexico. We do not want business interests to think we are being used by the Mexican government as a method of spreading political propaganda or that we are being used by the American government as a means of spreading propaganda concerning the so-called ‘good neighbor policy’ – which in the eyes of many business men has become a farce as far as Mexico is concerned.<sup>173</sup>

Rockefeller believed that the hostility towards Mexico existed much less “in government quarters” than it did in business sectors after the oil appropriation.

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<sup>171</sup> In casting about for what was truly American much earlier in the early 30’s, MoMA had in fact produced an exhibition called “American Sources of Modern Art: Aztec, Mayan, Incan” that emphasized modernism as a quality intrinsic to the Americas. MoMA exh. #29 (May 8-July 1, 1933).

<sup>172</sup>Exhibition Records, Box 106.5. “Twenty Centuries.” Undated handwritten note from Nelson Rockefeller to Monroe Wheeler. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>173</sup> Letter from Nelson Rockefeller to Richard Abbott February 14, 1940. Exhibition Records Box 106.12. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

The first extensive press release for the exhibition focused on the illuminating insights a nation's arts can reveal, and declared, "To know the arts of Mexico is to know and understand the Mexicans themselves, for the two are separately interwoven."<sup>174</sup> In the catalogue preface Barr expressed the hope of establishing closer relations: "Perhaps [we] might not have taken any great interest in South America [sic] had it not been for the war, the state of emergency, the necessity of establishing closer relations with the countries to the south." He then proceeded to make sweeping comparisons of American and Mexican culture: "Mexican art and culture seems in general to be more varied, more creative, and far more deeply rooted among the people, than ours. The Mexicans, of course, have one great advantage over us. They have an incomparably richer artistic past- two pasts in fact- a European and a native, both of which survive in modified form today."<sup>175</sup> Cultural assessments like this demonstrated that exhibitions of national arts were beginning to be considered as points of comparison for Americans to learn from, define their own national identity, and measure progress. They also registered a bilateral symmetry, suggesting Mexico's art riches balanced out America's economic strength. Momentarily, at least, Mexico and the U.S. might be equal partners.

"Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" was not without its disappointments. Abbott's handwritten memo to Barr at the conclusion of the exhibition confided what many MoMA staff and board members surmised: namely, "what "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" had cost to produce did not seem equal to the [human] effort expended on creating it."<sup>176</sup> Exhibition

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<sup>174</sup> "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art Opens at Museum of Modern Art." May 15, 1940, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives>

<sup>175</sup> Museum of Modern Art. *20 Centuries of Mexican Art/20 Siglos De Arte Mexicano*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1940). Preface by Alfred Barr.

<sup>176</sup> Exhibition Records Box 106.5 Memo dated July 10, 1940. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

attendance was disappointing; it was only about equal to the summer attendance of “Art in our Time: Tenth Year Anniversary Exhibition.”<sup>177</sup>

“Twenty Centuries” attendance in no way compared to that of “Italian Masters.” Perhaps this demonstrated a significant problem in race relations and prejudice; in any case, it showed that U.S. audiences did not feel the same kind of value or interest in Mexico’s arts and culture as they had in Renaissance Italian. Nevertheless, MoMA staff learned some invaluable lessons from working directly with Mexico. Certainly they recognized that Mexico had very different ways of doing business and of assessing their national arts.<sup>178</sup> Sometimes museums must compensate on their end or graciously accept some losses. Public acknowledgement by attendance isn’t always the only measure of an exhibition’s importance, particularly when war is looming.

It may have felt good for the MoMA staff to flex institutional muscle and accomplish goals never before achieved by their organization. Perhaps future gains from “Twenty Centuries” would materialize; hopefully it was a major step in building hemispheric unity that other Latin American nations would see and follow. Finally, it was institutionally gratifying to actively participate in building American diplomatic relations and receive attention from national and international government officials. Nelson Rockefeller would apply valuable lessons from “Twenty Centuries” to develop other Latin American exhibitions during the war.

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<sup>177</sup> (May 10- September 30, 1939) This exhibition was shown first at the 1939 World’s Fair and then reinstalled inside MoMA’s new building.

<sup>178</sup> There are a number of letters from Abbott to MoMA personnel describing strikes, in Mexico, differences in working style, and cultural dissimilarities in getting things done. But nowhere does there seem to be an awareness that MoMA’s working styles or assumptions might correspondingly appear strange or wrong to Mexican professionals. Exhibition records Box 106.12. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

As the decade ended, Rockefeller had showed himself a master at maximizing power. The year 1939 was dominated by his political presence as MoMA's President of the Board of Trustees but other sources of acquiring personal authority were in the offing. He had become vitally interested in world issues and had organized a think-tank of impressive advisors; the group called itself "La Junta" which met at Rockefeller's request to generate ideas.<sup>179</sup> Two of the group's most powerful members were public relations executive Anna Rosenberg and advertising executive William Benton, the latter who would eventually become publisher of Encyclopedia Britannica and serve as a Democratic State Senator from Connecticut. Both Rosenberg and Benton had high connections in the Roosevelt cabinet.

Rockefeller managed to make the most of combining his artistic and economic interests. By 1939 he had organized himself and his four brothers into the "Rockefeller Brothers Fund" to advance social change for a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world. He was also beginning to see MoMA's programs as a means to further America's international power. He and his advisors were now convinced that art could be a universal language, one that could help bring people together and contribute to world peace. Concerned about the rising influence of Nazism in many parts of South America, Rockefeller would soon convince President Roosevelt to create a government agency to eradicate this problem and insure cooperation in the Western Hemisphere. Rockefeller would merge and cross-fertilize his power bases in both MoMA and the government.

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<sup>179</sup>"La Junta" is Spanish for a powerful political committee or council. See Reich, 165.

Rockefeller had learned a great deal from his affiliations with Barr.<sup>180</sup> However, Barr probably did more than any other individual to develop and maintain MoMA's distinctive identity. He made sure that MoMA became equated with New York modernity, intelligence, and unpredictable artistic dynamism.<sup>181</sup> But whether Barr remained at the helm or not, in the span of a decade the MoMA had extended America's knowledge and definition of what constituted modern art, developed a strong institutional identity, and reinvigorated the art exhibition as a popular and provocative medium of social communication.

MoMA's decade of high-visibility exhibitions stretched the communicative power of exhibitions and demonstrated that U.S. art museums could compete in international arenas. Its influential traveling exhibitions program improved the taste and sophistication of many parts of the U.S. and its exhibitions proved that U.S. art museums could reinterpret world art, create new knowledge, and influence other nations. Both "Italian Masters" and "Twenty Centuries" were early signals that the U.S. might utilize art exhibitions for national diplomatic purposes, although individuals or resources from federal government had not been directly involved in either. In the next chapter, another art museum will emerge in Washington D.C. just before the entrance of the U.S. into the war effort, with a direct relationship to the national government, the arts of Europe, and international power.

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<sup>180</sup> For Barr's personal relationship with Nelson Rockefeller see Alice Goldfarb Marquis: *Alfred H. Barr: Missionary for the Modern*, (NY: McGraw-Hill, Contemporary Books, 1989), 328-30.

<sup>181</sup> Barr would remain at MoMA, for thirty more years, until his retirement in 1968. After his directorship, he became head of the museum's department of permanent collections.

## Chapter 2

### Old World Traditions and Excellence: The Wartime Origins of the National Gallery of Art

The mission of the National Gallery of Art (NGA), when it opened just before America's entrance into World War II, was different from that of the MoMA. NGA's elegant beginnings and institutional policies were intended to herald American appreciation and ownership of classic European and American art. These assets were epitomized by impressive displays of Old Master paintings presented within an impressive *Beaux Arts* structure located near the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., demonstrating that America had at last achieved a cultural sophistication and refinement on par with Europe.<sup>1</sup>

NGA's founder, Andrew W. Mellon, wanted to elevate America's cultural presence in the eyes of foreign nations. On a national level, he sought to provide the American people with the highest ideals and accomplishments of Western Civilization. He decided to donate a core of his outstanding, time-proven masterpieces for the nation to build on. Mellon wanted his National Gallery to garner many more such works, specifying a requirement of similar quality for any future additions to the collection.

For Mellon, quality was defined by Western definitions of connoisseurship in the high arts. His ideas derived from Immanuel Kant and G.F. W. Hegel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. American connoisseurship very much followed English modes of collecting.<sup>2</sup> His mission for NGA was not to create provocative exhibitions or feature modern or contemporary arts. He wanted the

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<sup>1</sup> An Old Master painting is any work by a nationally recognized artist painted in Europe before 1800.

<sup>2</sup> See Jonathan Conlin, "Collecting and connoisseurship in England, 1840-1900: the case of J. C. Robinson" In *Reflections Across the Pond: British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response*, Inge Reist, ed. (London: Ashgate, 2014), 133-146.

federal government to acknowledge the relationship between high-arts and political power.

Mellon's gift gave the federal government key responsibilities in the nation's arts.

Andrew Mellon was very much a part of what historian Daniel Rodgers refers to as social politics of the Progressive Era (1870-1945), a time when social ideas in urban settings were exchanged by elite individuals back and forth between Europe and the U.S. and were used to improve conditions of social welfare.<sup>3</sup> These ideas moved across the Atlantic in an active web of rivalry and exchange. Andrew Mellon actively studied the National Gallery of London and looked to it for ideas and solutions, in order to reproduce something very much like it on American soil, with certain adjustments required for cultural differences and American audiences.

The demand for greater democratization of the arts had begun with the Great Depression and would continue to grow with America's increasing involvement in World War II.<sup>4</sup> By now art museums were more directed towards improving the art sophistication of the general populace and being more responsive to public needs. Many major art museums had developed more active and changing temporary exhibition programs in the 1930's as evidenced by increased notices of them in museum journals.<sup>5</sup> As war approached, government officials sensed a heightened public interest and excitement in the arts; many wanted to take advantage

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998). Although Rodgers does not specifically mention arts and culture as an active area of interchange, Mellon's desire to take ideas about the arts for social improvement from Britain and adapt them to the United States is very much apart of the pattern Rodgers describes.

<sup>4</sup> Philip N. Youtz, "Museums Among Public Services," *The Museum News*, XI, no. 6, (September 15, 1933): 6-7. Ira Edwards, "The New Public Museum from a Director's Viewpoint," *The Museum News* XVIII, no. 5 (September 1, 1940): 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Flint. "Quick, Watson- The American Way," *Art News*, XL, no. 5 (April 15-30,1941): 39

of the situation and communicate civic ideas about patriotism through the medium of changing exhibitions.<sup>6</sup>

America's entrance into World War II soon required NGA's Director David Finley to make wartime adjustments to Mellon's vision. As the federal government's art museum in name, location, and basic funding support, the NGA was expected to play a leading role in communicating national ideals, particularly with respect to victory in war. Its early exhibition program sought to educate American citizens and help support the nation's war needs.<sup>7</sup> From its beginning the NGA took on special responsibilities for explicating the war, introducing the arts of foreign allies, and facilitating national diplomacy and cultural understanding through the presentation of international arts.<sup>8</sup> During this early period, the NGA was even induced to take on custodianship of foreign loans to the United States that were endangered if returned to Europe during the war.

At the same time, the NGA was charged with the mission of fostering and fulfilling Mellon's highest aspirations and improving the artistic taste of the nation. It needed to demonstrate that America's unique national spirit and elevated taste, embodied in the best of the fine arts, could take its rightful place alongside those of European countries.<sup>9</sup> This challenging balance required the crafting of a complex cultural argument that defined ideals of great traditional art and united them with contemporary values of patriotism, and democracy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Forbes Watson, "U.S. Museums Face the Wartime World." *Art News*, XL, no.18 (January 1-14,1942):

<sup>7</sup> Ralph H. Lewis, "Museums in Wartime – The British Example," *The Museum News* XVIII, no. 20 (April 15, 1941): 11.

<sup>8</sup> Grace L. McCann Morley, "Inter-American Cooperation in Art," *The Museum News*, XIX, no 9, (November 1, 1941): 11.

<sup>9</sup> Finley, 1973, 73-5.

<sup>10</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at the Dedication of the National Gallery of Art. March 17, 1941. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15334](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15334).



To be effective the doctrine should be articulated at the highest political level of presidential endorsement as a creed of mutually reinforcing standards. Early NGA exhibitions carried the banner in the nation's capital by lifting American confidence and morale and building public support for the war effort.

### **Andrew Mellon's Vision**

Andrew Mellon (1855-1937) was one of the wealthiest men in America. A "Gilded Age" banker, industrialist, philanthropist and art collector, he served as Secretary of Treasury from 1921 to 1932, throughout the administrations of presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover.<sup>11</sup> He subsequently became the eleventh U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain and eventually the founder and benefactor of America's National Gallery of Art. Throughout his lifetime, Mellon had definite ideas about what should constitute fine arts in America.

Mellon learned the ropes of collecting high European art during a trip he made to Europe as a young man, under the guidance of industrialist-collector and friend Henry Frick.<sup>12</sup> Over time Mellon made repeated trips abroad on his own, not only to purchase the finest quality Old Master paintings, but also to serve in various official capacities for the U.S. government. As Secretary of the Treasury, it was his responsibility to negotiate ongoing European World War I debts, particularly those of Germany.<sup>13</sup> It made sense for him to fulfill his official responsibilities and at the same time seek out and purchase the finest examples of European art for his personal collection.

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<sup>11</sup> David Cannadine, *Mellon an American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Finley, 1973, 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Sometime after 1921 Mellon met David Finley, a young tax-lawyer who worked in the Department of the Treasury. The two developed an immediate rapport. By 1924, Finley had ghostwritten Mellon's book *Taxation: The People's Business*, and also accompanied Mellon on various art collecting trips to Europe.<sup>14</sup> The Mellon-Finley alliance endured and became important to the creation the future National Gallery of Art.

Finley writes in his memoirs that by 1927 Mellon had decided to give his personal collection of art to the nation along with an elegant building to house it.<sup>15</sup> He asked if Finley he would help him get the project organized. Though Finley did not have a formal background in the arts, he was a rapid and willing learner. Mellon groomed him to curate the Mellon Collection and eventually direct the NGA.

The visual appearance of the capital and its environs was important. While serving as Secretary of Treasury in the 1920's, Mellon was asked by Congress to take on major responsibilities to refurbish government buildings.<sup>16</sup> The structures immediately surrounding the National Mall were badly in need of repair.<sup>17</sup> The "City Beautiful Movement" and the 1902 McMillan Plan had done some work to improve the appearance of the National Mall earlier in the century, but it soon became necessary to extend this program to other prime locations.<sup>18</sup> So urgent was the problem that Congress officially passed an act giving Mellon, in his capacity

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Mellon. *Taxation: The People's Business* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924).

<sup>15</sup> Finley, 1973,12.

<sup>16</sup> In the absence of a special commission, the U.S. Treasury was often the government's agency for handling issues concerning national art.

<sup>17</sup> Finley, 1973, 46-7.

<sup>18</sup> "City Beautiful" (1890-1920) was a nationwide program to introduce monumental grandeur in American cities. The MacMillan Plan (1902) was designed by the Senate Park Commission to beautify the monumental core and park system of the capital.

as Secretary of the Treasury, the responsibility to improve and extend the space for government buildings<sup>19</sup>

Located along Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, the Federal Triangle section of downtown Washington D.C. was a particular eyesore. Government agencies there were also badly in need of additional office space. The Public Buildings Commission made it a top priority to demolish parts of the Federal Triangle and construct a National Archives building.<sup>20</sup> As the official in charge, Mellon selected John Russell Pope to be chief architect; Pope had designed impressive Beaux-Arts style buildings in Washington and New York that Mellon admired.<sup>21</sup> When Pope's distinguished National Archives building opened in 1935, Mellon was more than pleased with the results. He subsequently asked Pope to design his future National Gallery of Art.<sup>22</sup>

Sometime during the 1920's, Mellon decided that a portion of the Federal Triangle was the perfect site for a future National Gallery of Art.<sup>23</sup> He asked Finley to help negotiate the title to the land, which was held by the George Washington Memorial Association. Mellon wrangled with the Association and Finley gracefully interceded with its President and the principal benefactor of the Memorial Association, Mrs. Charles Hamlin. Finley persuaded her to write a letter to the Committees of Congress and allow them to use the site for a new art museum.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Public Buildings Act of 1926 authorized a massive construction project, in part to provide office space for the growing federal agencies in the nation's capital.

<sup>20</sup> Finley, 1973, 10

<sup>21</sup> Beaux-arts is the neoclassical style of the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris, a combination of the academic, grand tradition of French, Italian, and Baroque Rococo architectural styles.

<sup>22</sup> Pope had designed the Frick Art Reference Library (1933) and the Duveen addition to the British Museum for the Elgin Marbles (1937).

<sup>23</sup> The site on Constitution Avenue between Fourth and Seventh Streets had been designated for a George Washington Memorial Auditorium. Mellon insisted on that location or stated he would take his collection elsewhere. David Cannadine, *Mellon an American Life*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 551.

<sup>24</sup> RG28A1, 10-13, David Finley Papers 1925-1976, personal correspondence with Mrs. Charles Hamlin. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Gallery Archives.

Located in close proximity to Congress, the future Gallery would have strong imperial associations with the government of the United States and serve as a place of pride to show foreign dignitaries.

During the 1920's, Andrew Mellon often felt embarrassed when leaders of foreign countries came to Washington D.C. to settle war debts and view important world art on display.<sup>25</sup> Guests would inevitably ask to be taken to a National Gallery so that they could view the country's national collections, but there were no elegant national collections in the U.S. to be had. The existing "national art collections" of the Smithsonian located in the Arts and Industries building were disappointing in Mellon's estimation. Neither the building nor its collections were impressive for European guests.<sup>26</sup> Mellon must have felt that this was a kind of national denigration; how could any powerful world country, particularly the United States, lack a major National Gallery of Art to emphasize its cultural importance and sophistication?

In fact, there were no important public collections of great European masterworks in Washington D.C. The Corcoran Gallery collected American art, the Phillips Collection collected modern art, and the Freer Gallery collected Asian art. The Smithsonian holdings featured traditional American paintings and decorative arts but confusingly mixed anthropological and natural history collections with paintings and sculptures.<sup>27</sup> To Mellon, the Smithsonian collections, such as they were, did not possess fine quality or radiate a distinctive high arts identity. Mellon was at pains to explain to European visitors that although there was no

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<sup>25</sup> Finley, 1973,12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Fink, 2007, 73.

National Gallery of Old Master works in the nation's capital, he would be glad to show them some important paintings in his own collections, located in his personal apartment.<sup>28</sup>

The Stock Market Crash in 1929 and the Great Depression caused tremendous pressures for both Andrew Mellon and President Hoover. In 1932, wishing to give an exhausted Mellon a rest, Hoover asked Mellon to become U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain.<sup>29</sup> Mellon was undoubtedly relieved to go abroad. He appealed to the State Department and insisted upon bringing David Finley with him to London as his speechwriter and right-hand-man. Once this was approved, he made Finley an attaché of the U.S. Embassy with the honorary rank of Counselor.<sup>30</sup> Both men obtained valuable experiences while living in Europe as diplomats.

Just a few years prior to their arrival, the Royal Academy of Arts in London began to accelerate its program of mega-loan exhibitions of international importance at Burlington House.<sup>31</sup> In 1930, for example, the Royal Academy presented a comprehensive loan exhibition of Italian Art (1200-1900) that even Mussolini had worked actively to support.<sup>32</sup> The Royal Academy subsequently produced a major loan exhibition of French masterworks (1200-1900) in 1932 that Mellon and Finley would have certainly seen while in London. Other shows from powerful countries were elegantly hosted. Anyone who saw Royal Academy shows would be impressed by them as assessments of Britain's political power and cultural worth. Such shows demonstrated that Britain had the stature and clout to serve as impresario for such grand art

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<sup>28</sup> David A. Doheny, *David Finley: Quiet Force for America's Arts* (Washington D.C: National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Gallery of Art, 2006.), 64. Made possible by a grant from the Estate of Paul Mellon.

<sup>29</sup> Doheny, 2006. 113-114.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>31</sup> Burlington House is a private Palladian mansion on Piccadilly in London that was purchased by the British government.

<sup>32</sup> Haskell, 2000, 107-127.

projects. Important loans on another country's soil signaled significant political contacts and powerful alliances.

Mellon thought about art a great deal while in London, although he was too busy to actively collect for himself.<sup>33</sup> Instead, he and Finley visited various British museums or galleries and asked for meetings with their lead officers. Mellon was especially interested in discussing the organization and operation of the museums and the construction of the buildings. The two men frequented the National Gallery, London, in an effort to collect ideas for installations.<sup>34</sup>

The National Gallery in London became a model for Mellon's future gift to America.<sup>35</sup> Mellon decided to pattern the architecture and the installations of his future National Gallery in Washington after Britain's National Gallery. Finley notes in his memoirs that Mellon greatly admired the way its paintings were displayed, and that it was then that he developed particular standards for displaying national arts.<sup>36</sup> It was also during this period that Mellon and Finley met the great European art historian, Bernard Berenson, and the powerful director of the British National Gallery, Kenneth Clark. Both became invaluable contacts for David Finley, especially once Mellon's future museum was up and running.

Mellon's vision for a National Gallery for the U.S. never wavered, even when personal political troubles emerged for him at home.<sup>37</sup> The Republicans lost power in 1933 and

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<sup>33</sup> Finley 1973, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Britain's National Gallery opened in London in 1838; it was one of several national museums founded by an Act of Parliament. Britain had always held that "the quality of a nation's art collections and the taste of her connoisseurs helped define her state of civilization and her international prestige" See Sheila Watson and Andrew Sawyer, "National Museums in Britain," In *European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen* Peter Aronsson & Gabriella Elgenius (eds.) EUNAMUS Report No. 1 Linköping University Electronic Press), 106. [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064).

<sup>36</sup> Finley, 1973,35.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office. He appointed Henry Morgenthau Jr. as Secretary of the Treasury. Both Roosevelt and Morgenthau immediately decided to seek a criminal indictment of Mellon for income tax invasion and improper sale of stock securities. Mellon, a Republican, became immersed in tax troubles that continued for the rest of his life.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, he never responded with vindictiveness and persevered in making personal plans to gift a National Gallery to America.<sup>39</sup>

### **Mellon's National Gallery versus the Smithsonian**

In the mid-30's, Mellon deliberated over the relationship his future National Gallery of Art should have with the existing Smithsonian Institution. It did not help that the Smithsonian already had an arts branch and was considered by some to constitute an informal equivalent to a National Gallery for America, even though it did not have an official presence, a distinct identity, or a separate building.

A clarification of the status of the art branch of the Smithsonian had actually been forced by a 1906 lawsuit having to do with the complications of an early bequest. The Harriet Lane Johnston Bequest could only come to the nation "in the event that the federal government should establish a national gallery of art."<sup>40</sup> The Supreme Court eventually ruled that although an actual national gallery building had never materialized, the nation had in

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<sup>38</sup>David Burnham, *A Law Unto itself: Power, Politics and the IRS* (New York: Random House, 1989), 230-231. According to Burnham, the Roosevelt Administration clearly mobilized the IRS for political purposes against Andrew Mellon who was a Republican. No charges against Mellon were ever substantiated though they were pursued vigorously, first through a grand jury in Philadelphia and later through the Board of Tax Appeals in Washington. Mellon would eventually be exonerated after his death in 1937, though his estate had to pay back taxes.

<sup>39</sup> Finley, 1973, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Fink, 2007, 57-59.

effect established such a gallery in principle, and thus made its best efforts for the Smithsonian arts collections. The Lane Bequest was accepted and efforts to create a distinct or more substantial Smithsonian National Gallery of Art never succeeded.<sup>41</sup> The sprawling Smithsonian had many competing needs and departments and either could not or would not direct sufficient funds towards a new structure dedicated to the arts. Although various groups tried over time to fundraise privately for such a building, they were never successful.<sup>42</sup>

The nation's arts collections had neither a proper home nor a place of honor. They were initially kept inside the National Patent Office.<sup>43</sup> Then they were moved to the Smithsonian "Castle" which was a Victorian style administrative structure dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Arts and Industries Building was the next solution for housing both the nation's arts and industrial collections together. There, artworks were mixed with ethnology, natural history specimens, plaster casts, and items of industry, much like the collections of other early civic museums.<sup>44</sup>

Though he tried hard, Charles Greenley Abbott, the President of the Smithsonian, was unable to entice Andrew Mellon to donate his collection.<sup>45</sup> This was because the Smithsonian was divided into many competing factions. Mellon considered its art collections, comprising only a minor part of the total Smithsonian holdings, to be quite unexceptional. Mellon, who knew too much about government and the Smithsonian's sluggish interest in the arts, never

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 119-20

<sup>44</sup> The Smithsonian collections of art in those years always contained more American works than European; almost anything offered to the nation was accepted.

<sup>45</sup> Fink, 2007, 75-82.



considered gifting his collection to the Smithsonian as a possibility. For him, the Smithsonian art collections were lacking quality and character. He had his own vision about the caliber of National Gallery of Art that was appropriate for America. In his mind, there clearly could not be two national galleries. His would have to take precedence.

Once he had decided on the necessary conditions for his gift to America, Mellon went straight to the office of the President of the United States. On December 22, 1936, just three days before Christmas, he sent a lengthy letter to Franklin Roosevelt in which he specified in great detail his proposed gift and its conditions.<sup>46</sup> Mellon offered his prestigious collections, an endowment for their future growth, and ample funding for a new building to be designated the “National Gallery of Art.” The building was to be constructed on a designated Federal Triangle site and its chief architect must be John Russell Pope. Although the National Gallery of Art might technically function as a “unit” within the Smithsonian for purposes of government convenience, it must have its own Board of Trustees that was independent from the Smithsonian’s Board and empowered to make its own bylaws and regulations governing operations. Both the National Gallery and the Smithsonian would essentially be joined yet separately governed entities.

Mellon further stipulated in his letter that he would gift a sizeable endowment, the income from which must be used to purchase artworks of the highest quality to build the collection and also pay the annual salaries of a director, assistant director, secretary, and curators of the gallery. He explicitly stated that once the new structure was completed,

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<sup>46</sup> For the December 26, 1936 letter from A.W. Mellon to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, see Finley.1973, 47-48. See also Franklin D. Roosevelt. “Excerpts from Letters with Andrew W. Mellon on the Gift of an Art Gallery to the United States, December 22, 1936. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15334](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15334).

Congress must provide annual appropriations for its upkeep and other administrative expenses, as well as pay costs for yearly operation and maintenance. Since American tax dollars were paying for the NGA's maintenance and upkeep, it was to remain open free of charge seven days a week and always be accessible to the American people, except on Christmas and New Years.

Finally, Mellon emphasized that any acquisitions for the National Gallery, whether by gift or purchase, must be strictly limited to objects of the greatest excellence and compatible with and consistent with the existing quality of the Mellon collections. The holdings of his National Gallery must eventually rank with those of other great galleries of the world. The highest standard of quality should always be maintained in installations. Interestingly, Mellon did not want the National Gallery to bear the Mellon name, since to do so might detract from the institution's majesty and make future donors hesitant to bestow important gifts on a building having the name of another benefactor.<sup>47</sup>

Quality was such an over-arching value for Mellon because he fervently believed that his gallery should teach the American public the enlightened benefits that could be found in appreciating great world art. Donald Shepard, Mellon's attorney, articulated Mellon's purpose in establishing the gallery: "There is a particular need for a national gallery of art for the artistic education of our people and it is apparent that the reputation of such an institution is dependent upon the quality of art to be exhibited in such a gallery...The national prestige which flows from the possession by a country of a great gallery of art is immeasurable."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Founding Benefactors of the National Gallery of Art. <https://www.nga.gov/features/.../founding-benefactors-of-the-national-gallery-of-art>.

<sup>48</sup> Fink, 2007,187. Memorandum from Donald E. Shepard to Kent E. Keller, Committee on the Library, House of Representatives, February 13, 1937.

Once Roosevelt received Mellon's offer in writing, things moved very quickly. He sent Mellon a response stating, "for many years I have felt the need for a national gallery of art in the Capitol... [your] collections...of first importance... will place the nation well up in the first rank."<sup>49</sup> On December 26 Mellon and Finley promptly met with the President and the U.S. Attorney General. Mellon's Washington attorney drafted legislation in conjunction with representatives of the Department of Justice and the Smithsonian Institution. A bill authorizing a new "National Gallery of Art" was prepared and introduced into Congress as House Joint Resolution 217. This passed without deliberation in early 1937.<sup>50</sup> A separate bill designated the Smithsonian's art collection to be officially named "The National Collection of Fine Arts."

The prospect of a National Gallery in the nation's capital was a gift that Congress could not refuse. Unlike their ambivalent response to the Smithsonian gift offered nearly a century ago they wasted no time in approving it. There was very little public complaint or congressional deliberation. Certain American artists, such as Thomas Hart Benton, were not at all pleased about Mellon's requirement to only show works by artists who had been dead at least twenty years, and adamantly insisted that European paintings were not American art.<sup>51</sup> But perhaps Mellon's largesse was too dazzling for Congress to turn down after such a time of economic hardship in America. Or perhaps leaders rationalized that there might be ways to incorporate living artists' works in occasional special exhibitions or that other American art museums could more easily represent living artists in their plans.

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<sup>49</sup> See Finley, 1973,49 for the December 26, 1936 reply from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Hon. A.W. Mellon.

<sup>50</sup> Subchapter II National Gallery of Art, February 19, 1937:  
*uscode.house.gov/view/xhtml/?oatg=prelim@title20/chapter 3/ subchapter 2.*

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Hart Benton, "Art vs. The Mellon Gallery," *Common Sense* 10 (June 1941): 173.  
See also Fink, 2007,89.

Mellon had, in fact, been able to accomplish something quite remarkable. For the first time America would have a world-class National Gallery of Art that could compete on international levels. He had persuaded the federal government to provide for the annual administrative expenses and maintenance of a world-class museum of art. He had, in essence, insisted that the federal government acknowledge the importance of high arts in America, something it had resisted since its inception.

### **David Finley Takes the Reins**

Once Congress passed a bill for the National Gallery, Mellon immediately asked John Russell Pope to create the exterior design. During much of 1937 Pope drew up basic plans for the building but Mellon did not live to see its completion. Andrew Mellon died on August 26, 1937. Remarkably, just one day after Andrew Mellon's demise, Pope also passed away.<sup>52</sup> It then became David Finley's responsibility to finish the building with Pope's successor, an American architect named Otto Eggers, who had previously worked with Pope and was familiar with his work.

Finley was officially named to the position of Director of the National Gallery of Art on March 9, 1938. There had never been any question that Finley would be offered this appointment.<sup>53</sup> No one else had worked so closely with Andrew Mellon and understood his hopes and ideals. Finley had been groomed for the position ever since Mellon had first envisioned his National Gallery in 1927.

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<sup>52</sup> Doheny, 2006, 124.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 134.

Prior to his death Mellon had, of course, communicated many of the specifications and details for the NGA interior to Finley. It was to be an elegant building, with sweeping gallery spaces that would attract future donations of important collections.<sup>54</sup> It was to feature the finest European materials, such as green marble from Lucca, Italy, to emphasize richness and grandeur. Décor and details should be kept simple yet graceful and impressive, without fussy embellishment.

During his lifetime, the composition of the NGA's Board of Trustees was spelled out by Mellon and put into law.<sup>55</sup> The Board consisted of the highest government officials having to do with law, diplomacy, and international affairs and also included several prominent citizens. The Chief Justice of the United States, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of the Smithsonian, would always be a member of the Board. Five other trustees who were significant collectors and U.S. citizens could also be added. Mellon had been adamant; no elected politicians or officials were allowed to serve.

The elite government officials who sat on the NGA Board set the tone of its activities and there were obviously important differences between the governance of NGA and MoMA. NGA's dignified Board of Trustees was not composed of wealthy socialites and certainly did not actively participate in the choices or development of NGA exhibitions. It had no exhibition committee and the Director and the chief curator made all exhibition decisions. Most of the

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<sup>54</sup> Finley, 1973, 73.

<sup>55</sup> "Public Resolution No. 14, Seventy-fifth Congress, approved March 24, 1937. Report on the National Gallery of Art for the Year Ended June 30, 1938." <https://www.nga.gov/about/annual-reports.html>. (accessed July 2017).

Board's deliberations had to do with approving acquisitions to the permanent collection, deciding political protocol, and resolving budgetary issues. The Board was also concerned with facilitating high-level donor relations, making decisions about custody of foreign collections for safekeeping during the war, and responding to diplomatic matters and government affairs. The Board made all of its decisions with the active participation of the Director and the Chief Curator, and generally followed their recommendations.

Apart from supervising the completion of the museum interior, Finley also had many other matters to accomplish in the capacity of Director. He met regularly with the Board, hired a permanent staff, worked out the details of day-to-day governance, collaborated with other government agencies, dealt with difficult collector personalities, and engaged in diplomatic pleasantries with world leaders. He also created workable policies for the museum that were compatible with the federal government and appropriate for the nation's highest art museum.<sup>56</sup>

Finley, who served as NGA Director for thirty years, was a low-key, well-seasoned, and respected government figure. The Board considered his opinions invaluable to the smooth workings of the institution. Finley had an uncanny knowledge of federal government operations and interpersonal diplomacy. He possessed prodigious knowledge about Mellon's wishes, contacts, and collections. His personality was gracious, efficient, and self-effacing and he did not insist upon flattery and fanfare. In the subtitle of his book, David A. Doheny, his major

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<sup>56</sup> Doheny, 2006, 140-1.

biographer, called Finley a “quiet force for America’s arts.”<sup>57</sup> Finley’s personality very much reflected the dignity and decorum of a statesman.

Finley chose his founding staff carefully and in concert with Andrew Mellon’s priorities, and interests. John Walker, who had assisted noted Italian art authority Bernard Berenson and was married to the daughter of the British Ambassador to Italy, was selected as Chief Curator. Harry McBride, a former Foreign Service officer and long-time government official, consented to be Administrator in Charge of Building Personnel. Huntington Cairns, formerly of the U.S. Treasury Department agreed to serve as Secretary-Treasurer and Counselor. MacGill James, former Director of the Peale Museum in Baltimore, was chosen as Assistant Director. Charles Seymour Jr. expert on Italian Renaissance sculpture and medieval art became curator of sculpture. A consultant restorer of paintings, Stephen Pichetto, of New York, was available to the Gallery when needed.<sup>58</sup>

Even given the national push felt in New York to make American artists more prominent, the NGA did not face the same degree of pressure that MoMA received to present the work of contemporary or living American artists. As a model for the nation, it was generally understood that the NGA needed a more traditional and restrained policy on fine arts acquisitions and exhibitions. Mellon had been very specific about enlarging the permanent collection through judicious gifts and purchases, and he had been clear on prohibiting art acquisitions from living artists. The museum collections were supposed to eventually include the finest traditional American masterworks and attract important gifts of classic American art.

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<sup>57</sup> Doheny 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 140.

A goal for Finley was to eventually improve the NGA's American collections so that they compared more favorably with the outstanding European masterworks. Although Mellon had gifted some key American examples, they were definitely in the minority. The Gallery's initial priorities were those of collection building: seeking out gifts and purchases of equal value that would build the permanent collection so that its holdings would rank with other great galleries of the world. For Finley, this meant actively wooing donors with collections of European and American art of the highest caliber according to connoisseurship mores. Three of these collections -- Samuel H. Kress, Joseph Widener, and Chester Dale -- had already been given to the NGA on the occasion of its opening. The Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection was hopefully in the offing; its donation would be announced by a tasteful exhibition of the collection.

In his lifetime Mellon had said very little about a temporary exhibition program for his Gallery. Indeed, creating an audience-driven exhibition program was never his concern nor did it seem necessary to generate public support. Temporary exhibitions with a high turn over were a useful tool to encourage gifts and insure return audiences and they were then commonly done in most American art museums. NGA curators created focused exhibitions highlighting collector accomplishments and interests in order to encourage important donations.<sup>59</sup> In this way, the splendid building, with its proximity to the Capitol Building and its hallowed permanent collections constituted a sufficient beacon on the hill to sustain public awe and interest, and then World War II intervened.

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<sup>59</sup> An example of this type of exhibition was "Prints and Drawings from the Rosenwald Collection" (December 19, 1943-February 13, 1944.)



## **An Elegant Yet Somber Opening**

The majestic NGA was ready to be inaugurated in March 1941 but it was a troubling time for the nation and the world at large. Germany had invaded major parts of Eastern Europe and gone onto Belgium, Netherlands, and France. Italy had become an ally of Germany. Fascism and communism were spreading as fearful ideologies. It seemed only a matter of time before the U.S. would be drawn into war.<sup>60</sup> Roosevelt began a Selective Service program so that a military draft would be ready; he also signed a Lend-Lease Act to aid Great Britain, thus ending American neutrality.<sup>61</sup>

The official inauguration of the NGA on March 17, 1941 came in the nick of time, just months before the U.S. officially entered the war. David Finley noted in his memoirs, “war clouds were gathering across the nation and the Gallery opening dared not wait any longer.”<sup>62</sup> So many people attended the opening it was impossible for them all to be seated: there were 8,822 invited guests. Those in attendance included the members of the Cabinet, Senate, and House of Representatives, government officials, the diplomatic corps, artists, art critics, heads of educational institutions, collectors, and other distinguished guests.<sup>63</sup>

The evening featured a formal half-hour program that was broadcast to the nation via radio.<sup>64</sup> The program began with the Marine Band playing as President Roosevelt made his

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<sup>60</sup> The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor came eight months later, December 7, 1941.

<sup>61</sup> The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 (Pub.L.76=783 54 State 885) was enacted September 16, 1940. The Lend Lease Bill dated January 10, 1941 was the principal means for providing U.S. military aid to foreign nations during World War II. (Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, HR 77A-D13, Record Group 233, National Archives.)

<sup>62</sup> Finley, 1973,103.

<sup>63</sup> Report on the National Gallery of Art; Appendix of the Smithsonian Annual Report, Government Printing Office, 1941, 34-44.

<sup>64</sup> “President Roosevelt to dedicate National Gallery of Art,” February 27, 1941  
<https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-release>.

entrance. A brief statement by Chief Justice Hughes followed an invocation by the Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. Paul Mellon (Andrew Mellon's son) presented the Gallery and collection to the President of the United States on behalf of the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust. Donor Samuel H. Kress presented his collection to the National Gallery.

At the program's climax, President Roosevelt accepted the building and collections on behalf of the people of the United States. The President spoke for ten minutes, his eloquent words likely suggested by David Finley who had been a speechwriter for Andrew Mellon. Roosevelt's remarks contained important information about the necessity for the arts at a time of great national peril and concern. The speech was reprinted in press releases, bulletins, newspapers, and journals that reverberated across the nation.<sup>65</sup>

Roosevelt began by emphasizing the significance of the NGA collections and the unique historic context in which they were being given and received. He noted that the European paintings and sculptures now owned by the nation signified a new relationship between America and Europe: "a new relation here made visible in paint and in stone—between the whole people of this country, and the old inherited tradition of the arts."<sup>66</sup>

Roosevelt emphasized that America's understanding of the arts had changed and deepened. He explained that fine art was no longer simply a treasure from the past or an importation from another land but it was now considered to be part of our present lives. He acknowledged that in the past Americans did not feel that an inheritance of paintings and

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<sup>65</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at the Dedication of the National Gallery of Art," March 17, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid-16091>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

sculptures from Europe belonged to them, that they felt this art was “something foreign to America.” He emphasized that Americans now know that the arts do have a function in their lives; they have not only made arts themselves, they have seen them “in rooms full of painting and sculpture by Americans...some of it good and some of it not so good, but all of it native, human, eager, and alive and all of it painted by their own kind in their own country, painted about things that they know and look at often and have touched and loved.”<sup>67</sup>

Roosevelt ended by celebrating the national ideals of what great artworks signified. He declared that to accept these works today “is to assert the purpose of the people of America that the freedom of the human spirit and the human mind which has produced the world’s great art and all of its science shall not be utterly destroyed.” He continued:

Whatever those paintings [may have signified] to the men who looked at them a generation back, today they are not only works of art. Today they are the symbols of the human spirit, and of the world against which armies are now raised... To accept the work of German... Italian... painters of the Low Countries...Frenchmen, and Spaniards on behalf of the people of this democratic Nation is to assert the belief of the people of this nation in a human spirit which is now everywhere endangered...To accept this work today is to assert the purpose of the people of America that the freedom of the human spirit and the human mind which has produced the world’s great art and all its science shall not be utterly destroyed...that the freedom of the human spirit shall go on.<sup>68</sup>

The President’s remarks seemed to be encouraging alliances with European allies and perhaps preparing the nation for war by deftly emphasizing common humanistic values embedded in the arts that must be protected. But more importantly his remarks had underscored and reoriented the meaning of the arts in America for the public at large and given the art museums of America much greater authority. The fine arts represented in U.S. art

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

museums represented the highest standards and national ideals of democracy and freedom that must be preserved at all costs. Art museums had important responsibilities in upholding the nation's highest values; they were places for the people of America to look up to that protected and nurtured the highest ideals and values of the nation. The NGA was now "the people's museum;" the President had accepted it on behalf of the people of the United States.<sup>69</sup>

Images of lavish NGA displays and artworks splashed across the national press and became a model for all U.S. art museums to follow. Directors and chief curators came to examine firsthand or read about the collections and installations, and then compare their home collections and displays with the lavish examples presented in Washington. *Art News*, the main U.S. arts periodical, dedicated three Special Issues to the National Gallery with copious full or half-page color images from the permanent collection.<sup>70</sup> Special Issue Number One covered the splendid building itself, emphasizing that the total number of separate galleries within the building numbered over one hundred and that the entire structure was larger than the Capitol Building and covered the size of over three football fields.

The up-to-the minute features of the NGA threatened to shame civic art museums. The building was completely air-conditioned and sound-proofed; its lighting was praised as ideal. The painting galleries were sky-lit. Varied wall treatments for each period ensured that the works in each gallery were shown to best advantage; gallery walls were custom-tailored in color

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<sup>69</sup> Finley, 1973,103.

<sup>70</sup> *Art News Special Issue (1) for the National Gallery of Art XL*, no 3 (March 15-31, 1941); *Special Issue No. 2 for the National Gallery of Art XL*, no. 8 (June 1-30, 1941); *Art News Special Issue No. 3 for the National Gallery of Art XL*, no. 9 (July 1-31,1941).

and material to complement the dazzling paintings of Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain and Britain. The most important American art critic, Alfred Frankfurter, profusely complemented the amply illustrated European galleries in all three issues of *Art News*.<sup>71</sup>

The European works appeared to be so splendid by comparison that any discussion of the American collections on display required skill and tact. An article by James W. Lane, a rising expert in classic American art, evidently anticipated this problem and tried to squelch any critical remarks by stating, "Some people who know nothing of our national art are in the habit of asserting that it lacks aesthetic distinction [but] the National Gallery, by making its first hanging of American paintings small and select, should scotch at once this idea. With one or two minor exceptions all the canvases now hanging in its distinguished selection from our Colonial period look well against the best in European art galleries."<sup>72</sup> Later he noted, "It is a pity that more American paintings were not shown...some day we hope that ...continuity may be achieved." It seemed the classic American collections were off to a solid start; over time they could grow with judicious cultivation of donors and solid direction.

David Finley had orchestrated an outstanding inauguration for the National Gallery, There was overwhelming celebration and very little direct criticism of the Gallery in the press. High attendances at the NGA were the subject of repeated subsequent press releases.<sup>73</sup> But a letter from a high-placed visitor one year later complaining to NGA's President of the Board of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> James W. Lane, "The National Gallery's American Pictures" *Art News: Special Issue Number 3 for the National Gallery of Art*, XL, no. 9, (July 1-31, 1941): 13 and 27.

<sup>73</sup> "Press Release Regarding Attendance During First Week National Gallery of Art Open to the Public, March 26, 1941:" During the first week of operation 76,737 visitors came to the Gallery; on Sunday when the Gallery was open from only 2-5, the attendance was 24,745. "For Immediate Release June 5, 1941:" During the two and a half months which have elapsed since the opening...641,277 persons have visited the Gallery...averaging over 8,000 people a day." <https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-releases.html>

Trustees, David Bruce, must have made a strong impact on Finley since he kept it in his personal papers. The visitor commented that the great galleries of Europe did not have “slavish obeisance before alien cultures but rather an affirmation of the culture by which people lived.” And so neither should the National Gallery of America.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps with the surge of American patriotism, the tenuous balance of heralding high European art on American soil still needed more careful calibration.

NGA was now officially the nation’s most politically important art museum, closely associated with the federal government. It could culturally represent America and conduct itself with pride on the international stage. Behind the scenes it could operate in concert with political needs, and with other powerful governmental agencies to serve the growing requirements of democracy. It was at once a museum of the American people, but it was also a representation of the art identity of the federal government.

Finley surely understood this complex mix of sometimes-conflicting responsibilities. He had to acknowledge the needs of ordinary Americans and also respond to government necessities. He had to be the penultimate diplomat and meet with and collaborate with world leaders. The NGA was a commanding symbol of the U.S. government, strategically located in the power-center of the nation. Its birth signified a cultural coming of age for America.

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<sup>74</sup> The letter, cited by Doheny, 2006, 180, is located in the David Finley Papers, Box 20, Library of Congress,

## **NGA's Wartime Exhibition Program: Patriotism and Diplomacy**

Little that Andrew Mellon did during his lifetime indicates he was concerned about or foresaw America's entrance into World War II. His priorities for the NGA had been to enhance America's artistic identity in the world, help America's appreciate the finest of arts, and make world-class art collections free and available to the American people who could then improve themselves through artistic education and proximity to great world arts.

Mellon had said very little about a temporary exhibition program or what exactly any exhibition program for NGA should be. He had made a point of prohibiting living artists from being represented in the permanent collection, but there was no reason for the NGA not to offer temporary exhibitions with works by living artists in them. In fact, one of the initial NGA press releases accompanying the opening noted in a final paragraph that living artists would be represented in temporary exhibitions "from time to time," which indicates a need to pacify any anticipated public grumbling.<sup>75</sup> Since the NGA collections were obviously rooted in time-proven arts, the public pressures on the NGA to represent modern art were not acute. Certainly the NGA would be expected to represent both high European art and traditional American artists, and programs of "classic" American painters could be folded very easily into temporary exhibitions.

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<sup>75</sup> "The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Washington," March 1, 1941. "According to the policy of the Gallery, the permanent collection will be restricted to the work of artists whose reputations have been established for at least twenty years following death, and their work, of course, must be of an exceptionally high standard of quality. However, in a specially designed gallery there will be, from time to time, loan exhibitions of the work of living artists, and the National Gallery will make every effort to cooperate with other Government agencies in encouraging the best in contemporary American art." <https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-releases.html>

As time went on, however, it became apparent to Finley and NGA Board that it would be necessary to create more exhibition “wiggle room” in order to programmatically maneuver between Mellon’s high ideals of artistic excellence and the needs of the federal government. The NGA was clearly the government’s art museum and Finley felt a responsibility, if asked, to reinforce presidential messages and cooperate with key government agencies, which were less concerned with excellence in the arts than Mellon.

NGA’s war related exhibitions are important to study because they demonstrate how the Board and its Director tried to align government needs with Mellon’s wishes. Most of them, at a rate of five to six per year between 1942-5, contained works by America’s living artists promoting national defense and morale.<sup>76</sup> Also included were major exhibitions that helped strengthen U.S. diplomatic ties and relations during wartime.

“Two Hundred American Watercolors” (1940) was the first temporary exhibition in the category of supporting the American government and establishing national morale.<sup>77</sup> This exhibition, which occurred after President Roosevelt’s declaration of “National Art Week,” was the result of a nation-wide competition conducted by the Fine Arts Section of the federal Public Buildings Administration.<sup>78</sup> It consisted of scenes of American life. The purpose of the competition was to secure artworks by living artists to improve morale and decorate the U.S. Marine Hospital for Lepers in Carville Louisiana.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Appendix III

<sup>77</sup> The dates of the exhibition were May 15 – June 4, 1941.

<sup>78</sup> “National Art Week” was a nationwide effort to support contemporary American artists and buy American art, involving the nation’s art museums. It receives analysis in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>79</sup> Leprosy had been a concern for the military since the Spanish-American War. The disease was a result of imperial expansion into tropical areas and war veterans were particularly susceptible. The Marines had a stake in improving medical treatments and some of the best medical work occurred in Carville.



Edward Bruce, who was the Director Public Works of Art section of the FAP, directed the competition, which was juried by an advisory committee of four contemporary American artists. There were ten thousand entries, the government planned to purchase a total of five hundred works for thirty dollars apiece with funds provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.<sup>80</sup> A portion of the five hundred would go to the Carville hospital, the remainder to other federal hospitals. The exhibition was popular with the public and the critics. Attendance on a Saturday exceeded, 23,000.<sup>81</sup> After an initial showing of the most important entries in Washington D.C., the exhibition traveled to six other American cities.<sup>82</sup>

The second war-related exhibition that NGA featured was graphic depictions of the valiant efforts of the London Fire Brigade before, during, and after the London Blitz. “The Great Fire of London, 1940” honored the efforts of the Great Britain Auxiliary Fire Service and demonstrated to U.S. citizens the importance of adequate civil defense.

There was a political narrative behind this art exhibition. Winston Churchill was anxious for the United States to join the war effort; the British War office and the National Gallery of London were actively involved in patriotic art activities for broader support. Sir Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery of London and respected colleague of David Finley, created this special exhibition especially for the NGA.<sup>83</sup> A parallel exhibition called “Britain at War” was

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<sup>80</sup> “200 American Watercolors,” May 1, 1941, <https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-releases.html>

<sup>81</sup> “Two Hundred American Watercolors” <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/exhibitions/1941> (accessed 8/2-15).

<sup>82</sup> The cities were Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia (two venues), and New York. Exhibition brochure: *An Exhibition of Two Hundred American Watercolors*, by Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1941.

offered to the MoMA in New York at approximately the same time.<sup>84</sup> Both exhibitions consisted of paintings by living British artists and were intended to inspire America to join the war.

Each exhibition provided insights into the war effort through the eyes of living British artists at the warfront.<sup>85</sup> Both presentations were outside each institution's usual programs and were avidly attended. The exhibitions demonstrate that both NGA and MoMA were willing to remain flexible in their institutional standards during wartime. Great Britain's leaders hoped to use these exhibitions to influence American public opinion, bring sympathy to the British cause, and hopefully make it easier for the U.S. to enter the war.<sup>86</sup>

"The Great Fire of London, 1940" was sponsored by the British government under the auspices of the British Library of Information, It had the backing of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia of New York who also served as Director of Civilian Defense for the U.S. "Great Fire" consisted of one hundred and seven works by twenty-two British artists that Sir Kenneth Clark had personally selected.<sup>87</sup> To broaden public interest three London firemen who had served in the Blitz accompanied the exhibition and traveled the country with it, answering questions about the bombing raids and their effect on British civilian populations. The exhibition also promised to show "horrors and trials bravely faced by sensitive men and women capable not only of hard

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<sup>84</sup> Sir Kenneth Clark was also Chairman of the War Artists' Advisory Committee. He persuaded the British government not to recruit Britain's valued artists.

<sup>85</sup> Monroe Wheeler, ed., *Britain at War* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941). See also exhibition file: "Great Fire of London, 1940." Record Group 7 7A2 Central Files Box 41, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Gallery Archives. See Scrapbook and brochure.

<sup>86</sup> In July 1941, Roosevelt had already directed benefits of the U.S. Lend-Lease Program towards Great Britain.

<sup>87</sup> The dates of the exhibition in Washington D.C. were July 18- August 10, 1941.

physical labor in defense of their country but also of instant creative effort which will record for posterity actual scenes as the artists saw them.”<sup>88</sup>

Soon thereafter, NGA began to feature exhibitions honoring the arts of Allied nations that served a diplomatic function. One major example, “Art of Australia 1788-1941,” was created and funded by the Australian government and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.<sup>89</sup> The 1941 exhibition’s purpose was to strengthen diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Australia in wartime by offering the best of Australian art.

Although the artworks themselves had nothing to do with war, Australia was anxious to promote security alliances during wartime, and the Carnegie Corporation, one of the most powerful philanthropic trusts in America, induced NGA to accept the exhibition as a matter of national diplomacy and goodwill.<sup>90</sup> This exhibition was an early example of a collaborative national diplomacy exhibition offered for strategic purposes in time of war on U.S. soil; its particular story of development requires further explanation to understand how official decisions about national representation were made.

Frederick P. Keppel, director of the Carnegie Corporation, had a keen interest in national diplomacy. He had served as U.S. Assistant Secretary of War during World War I and held a number of subsequent government positions. In 1922 Keppel became President of the Carnegie Corporation and remained there until 1941. The Carnegie Corporation wished to develop major

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<sup>88</sup> “London War Art Is Shown Here: Notables at Opening of National’s Exhibit.” *Times Herald*, Friday, July 18, 1941. Clipping obtained from NGA Scrapbook dated March 41-September 41. Gallery Archives.

<sup>89</sup> The dates of this exhibition at NGA were October 2-26, 1941.

<sup>90</sup> Australian Exhibition Correspondence September 1941RG7A7 Central Files, Exhibition Files Microfilm, 1941-1965, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gallery Archives.

exhibitions with British Colonies and Dominions in order to combat U.S. isolation and foster closer cultural relations and understanding.<sup>91</sup>

Theodore Sizer, Director of Yale University Art Museum was approached by the Carnegie Corporation and asked to organize the Australia exhibition as well as one other on the arts of New Zealand.<sup>92</sup> Sizer was told to work in consultation with various national advisory committees in those countries. From the beginning Sizer wanted to impose his preferences for a primitivist-inflected modernism on the artistic profiles of each country, choosing to incorporate indigenous arts of the Aboriginal and Maori peoples.<sup>93</sup>

The arts advisory committees of each nation disagreed on this matter and wished to promote what they considered to be “civilized artistic styles” in the British tradition, indicating any emphasis on Aboriginal or Maori arts was inappropriate. This was an international selection criterion regarding racial hierarchies within populations that the U.S. could itself be accused of harboring since Native American arts were never included with national representations of American arts. But Sizer insisted on including examples of indigenous Aboriginal art and was primarily concerned with how the exhibitions would stand up aesthetically given American audiences’ tastes for the new or unexpected. He felt that Americans were definitely interested

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<sup>91</sup> Caroline Jordan and Rebecca Rice, “Cultural Propaganda and the Politics of Taste: The Carnegie Corporation’s Cancelled Art of New Zealand Exhibition, 1941” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 14, no. 2 (2014,) 118-140.

<sup>92</sup> When Pearl Harbor was attacked, the spread of war to the Pacific made it necessary for the New Zealand government to postpone the exhibition; it never got rescheduled.

<sup>93</sup> Caroline Jordan, “Cultural Exchange in the Midst of Chaos: Theodore Sizer’s Exhibition ‘Art of Australia 1788-1941,” *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art* 13, no. 1 (2013) [www.academia.edu/4122041/Cultural\\_exchange\\_in\\_the\\_midst\\_of\\_chaos\\_Theodore\\_Sizers\\_exhibition\\_Art\\_of\\_Australia\\_1788-1941](http://www.academia.edu/4122041/Cultural_exchange_in_the_midst_of_chaos_Theodore_Sizers_exhibition_Art_of_Australia_1788-1941).

in more modern or abstract styles and many of the works promoted by the committee in Australia were much more staid, traditional British examples.

Sizer felt that there were historic commonalities between U.S. and Australia and was particularly interested in how “another branch of Anglo-Saxon people had developed culturally under new and pioneering environments.”<sup>94</sup> He wanted the exhibition to be tailor-made for American audiences and feature artworks that were unique and provocative. He cautioned that it would not be possible to schedule the show in the U.S. if American audiences did not consider their works interesting. He was ultimately able to win a modest representation of Aboriginal art in the exhibition although there were many more Anglo-Saxon derived artworks in the iconic selection. This negotiation process illustrates the growing power a museum professional representing America possessed in order to represent and hence define the art of a foreign nation.

“Art of Australia, 1788-1941” opened at the NGA in October 1941. The Australian government was pleased at such an honor and the maximum visibility it afforded. The Australian Minister declared, “If the art of a nation is to flourish, her painters must have protection and encouragement. This, the United States has for some time appreciated and has now laid the basis for a proud national art. It is hoped that Australia may some day contrive to do the same for her young painters...”<sup>95</sup> Clearly, Australia wanted to increase its international arts identity and join the community of nations by presenting a decisive profile of what had

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<sup>94</sup> Loan Exhibitions Held 1941- Art of Australia-Misc. L7806. Letter from Theodore Sizer to Francis Henry Taylor dated April 16, 1941. Museum Archives: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>95</sup> “Exhibition of Australian Art,” September 28, 1941, (accessed July 2017) <https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-releases.html>

already made Australia's artistry unique. It is interesting that Australia looked to America rather than to Britain for assistance in defining a profile for its national art.<sup>96</sup> But an even more basic reason for acquainting American audiences with the art of Australia was that it would brought mutual understanding and helped justify why it was important for U.S. soldiers to risk their lives fighting in the Pacific.<sup>97</sup>

The sharing of institutional responsibilities for the development of "Art of Australia" is worth examining because its method of production provided a prototype for American museums joining together in the creation of exhibitions. No single American museum was able to or would agree to handle all of the exhibition's substantial organizational or logistical requirements. The Met was willing to present the exhibition but only if it was juried. Sizer then realized that before he could place the exhibition at the Met or anywhere else, he would need to have the final object selection juried by a committee of American museum directors and a Carnegie representative. MoMA had declined to accept the exhibition in New York but was willing to jury the art selection and publish the catalogue.<sup>98</sup> The NGA agreed to present the show on behalf of the U.S. government, and lend its prestige to the artworks, but it did not want any part in organizing or judging it. The Brooklyn Art Museum agreed to make the

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<sup>96</sup> Caroline Jordan, "Cultural Exchange in the Midst of Chaos: Theodore Sizer's Exhibition Art of Australia 1788-1941" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 13, no.1, (2013). 25-50.

<sup>97</sup> New Zealand also wanted an exhibition of its art since it was also urgently in need of U.S. protection in the Pacific, but the exhibition could not go forward when it became too risky to send valuable cargo across the Pacific. See Carolyn Jordan and Rebecca Rice, 1941.

<sup>98</sup> Sydney Ure Smith, *Art of Australia, 1788-1941* (New York: Museum of Modern Art for the Carnegie Corporation, 1941). Frederick P. Keppel, President of the Carnegie Corporation, wrote the Preface. The exhibition traveled to the NGA, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, and the Met. The Carnegie and the Commonwealth Government paid the exhibition expenses. A portion of the exhibition, considered by the MoMA to be the lesser works, was shown in Canada and not in the United States.

logistical arrangements for the American circuit of the exhibition but it did not itself host the show. Many organizational pieces needed to be cobbled together; in the process museums found that they could cooperatively share limited and well-defined responsibilities without overwhelming their respective staffs.

The “Art of Australia” exhibition demonstrated that the United States had the power to participate in defining national artistic canons for foreign countries that were amenable to working with them. It also showed how responsibilities for developing and hosting complex exhibitions could be shared among a number of different U.S. museums. Perhaps all of this cooperation occurred at the behest of the powerful Carnegie Corporation, whom all American museums were anxious to please for the sake of future relations and funding support. But art museums also learned that if they worked together, their individual workloads could be minimized and held within reason.

“Art of Australia” demonstrated that American art museums were learning how to more efficiently organize complex and labor-intensive exhibitions by sharing technical responsibilities. It also showed that international diplomacy during wartime could shape public opinion, and the value of hosting official public openings for the media. The exhibition eventually enjoyed an astonishing twenty-six venues throughout the United States and Canada.<sup>99</sup>

Sizer went on to develop a large “Art of New Zealand” exhibition for the Carnegie Corporation.<sup>100</sup> New Zealand was urgently in need of protection in the Pacific and considered it

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<sup>99</sup> Jordan, 2013, 24.

<sup>100</sup> Caroline Jordan and Rebecca Rice, “Cultural Propaganda and the Politics of Taste: The Carnegie Corporation’s cancelled Art of New Zealand Exhibition” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 14, no. 2 (2014): 118-140.

important to familiarize American citizens with New Zealand allies. Sizer had set the precedent of including Aboriginal art and could use this argument for the inclusion of Maori. The leaders of New Zealand very much wanted an exhibition were also concerned that the needs of Australia might overshadow theirs.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately, the exhibition was cancelled when it was believed to be too risky to send valuable cargo across the Pacific.

The National Gallery had no organizational responsibility for creating the Australian exhibition; it simply had the responsibility to host it. In a way, however, the Australian show created a diplomatic precedent for the NGA. In administering NGA's wartime exhibition program, David Finley and the Trustees had to balance Andrew Mellon's ideals of excellence with the needs of the federal government. Finley was generally able to consistently direct his staff to focus on more lasting projects than creating temporary exhibitions. These included developing the permanent collections and put the bulk of their efforts into publishing the permanent collection, expanding the depth and breadth of its holdings, being on hand to serve donor requests or important visitors, and enhancing permanent displays. But the NGA also had to respond to official exhibition requests from the federal government.

Changing exhibitions related to war that the NGA accepted on behalf of the government constituted nearly half of all exhibitions NGA presented between 1942-45. The majority of them were exhibitions of combat arts (see subsequent chapters) but some were important diplomacy exhibitions solidifying and officially acknowledging international relations. They were all organized elsewhere and then offered to the NGA for presentation. This did not excessively burden NGA staff or technically detract from Mellon's collection development goals. All of the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



exhibitions were time-limited, usually lasting one month or less. Almost half (46%) of the special exhibitions at NGA between 1942-5 were government-sanctioned, supported the war, developed American morale, or facilitated national diplomacy through displaying foreign arts. The more self-serving exhibitions to develop the NGA permanent collections held during those years constituted the remainder of offerings (35% European and 18% mainstream American).<sup>102</sup>

Given the unique and hopefully limited duration of the war, no one criticized NGA's early exhibition offerings for being a catchall for various patriotic projects. There was evidently room for showing temporary collections of non-elite arts if they served the political needs of the nation or if they were important to key government officials. NGA did not spend large amounts of staff time soliciting and coordinating outside loans or developing and implementing special exhibitions; it could graciously agree to mount short-term temporary exhibitions that had been developed elsewhere if they served national purposes.

### **Protection of French and Belgian National Collections During World War II**

The safekeeping of loaned European artworks needed to be officially assured during wartime when it was not safe for the works to return to their home countries. An important arts responsibility of the federal government, and hence of the NGA during the war became the protection of national European artworks that had been temporarily "stranded" across the Atlantic and hold them in U.S. temporary custody until it was safe for them to be returned. NGA or MoMA did not solicit these foreign loans; instead they had originated from exhibitions

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<sup>102</sup> The percentages in this paragraph derive from analysis of exhibition titles from both institutions.

planned by a second-tier of U.S. museums that had obtained loans on their own from France and Belgium.

The governments of France and Belgium were under threat from the Nazis in 1939. Poland had been attacked; the Germans then went onto occupy France. An exhibition of French art loaned from Paris had just opened in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1939. At the exhibition's close, it was not possible for France's paintings to be returned to the Louvre since the Louvre was in the active process of evacuating its key paintings to safer locations outside of Paris.

Dr. Walter Heil, the Director of two art museums in San Francisco and Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts for the 1939 San Francisco World's Fair, became aware of the French loans asked if the paintings could travel from Buenos Aires to San Francisco to be shown at the 1939 World's Fair.<sup>103</sup> There were so many of these loans that needed safekeeping so Heil decided to share the status and wealth, assert San Francisco's institutional power, and divide up the collection among different U.S. institutions. He deftly arranged for some of the paintings to be exhibited in San Francisco, others to be shown in New York at their 1939 World's Fair, and still others to be organized into several exhibition circuits throughout major American cities.

Heil, who was of German extraction and had become an American citizen, was an expert in European art. He had successfully negotiated with the French Vichy government just at the right time. The Vichy government agreed for paintings to be lent "for the duration of the war"

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<sup>103</sup> "The Golden Gate International Exposition" (GGIE) of 1939 -1940, was held on San Francisco's Treasure Island. It was a World's Fair celebrating, among other things, the City's two newly built bridges: the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge (1936) and the Golden Gate Bridge (1937.) The two museums in San Francisco that Heil directed were the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

which they surmised at the time would be approximately one year.<sup>104</sup> All did not go as planned. Unfortunately, damage had occurred to some of the French paintings early in the circuit and then San Francisco itself seemed to be in danger of attack by the Germans. The Louvre subsequently directed that all future exhibitions of the loaned paintings be called off and asked that they be stored until further notice at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>105</sup>

Finley saw an opportunity. Six months prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, he had prudently followed Britain's example and arranged for NGA's most important permanent display collections to be secretly shipped to the Biltmore mansion in South Carolina where they would be hidden and protected in the event of air raids over the capital.<sup>106</sup> But the situation had changed; or perhaps Finley surmised that the French paintings would benefit more from being exhibited in Washington D.C. than languishing in storage in New York. Certainly any request from the nation's most important art museum would take precedence over arrangements with the Met. Finley, who now had empty gallery spaces to fill, suggested to the Louvre that the French paintings should instead come to Washington where they could be exhibited at the NGA. Evidently permission was given from the French government and the paintings were sent to Washington, D.C. where they were placed on exhibition.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Nancy H. Yeide, "The Spirit of France: The 1940-46 Exhibition of French Art in the United States. *The Burlington Magazine* CLIV, no.1313 (August 2012): 564-569.

The Vichy regime helped Nazi Germany during World War II. Germany militarily occupied northern France and Paris remained the *de jure* capital. The *de facto* capital of the French state was in Vichy.

<sup>105</sup> French Collection: Original Works of Art, Transfer of French Works of Art. National Gallery of Art RG17, General Curatorial: World War II Files, 1941-1953, Series 17A5, Box 7., Washington D.C. Gallery Archives.

<sup>106</sup> Doheny, 1973, 177.

<sup>107</sup> Evidently the NGA had less qualms about the safety of French national art in the event that Washington D.C. was bombed.

In June 1943 the U.S. Department of State asked the Trustees of the NGA to accept temporary custody for all works owned by the French government or French citizens that were already at the NGA plus “all French works of art in the U.S. in which the former French government had an interest.” Special permission was obtained from the U.S. government to allow for an extended stay of French national assets until the war ended. The NGA trustees subsequently agreed to accept responsibility for the works, and August 19<sup>th</sup> the Foreign Funds Control Unit of the U.S. Treasury Department issued a formal license to authorize custodianship.<sup>108</sup>

The NGA was then responsible for collecting all French-owned works from various U.S. cities. The French government agreed to pay the costs of insurance, storage, restoration, and shipping. René Batigne, original curator of the “French Government Exhibition,” moved to Washington, D.C. between 1942-1946 to oversee the custody of all French works whether on exhibition or in storage at NGA.<sup>109</sup>

A similar custody arrangement occurred with the Belgian government. The Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts and the Philadelphia Museum of Art had collaborated to create a major exhibition of Flemish Paintings called “The Worcester-Philadelphia Exhibition of Flemish Painting” in 1939.<sup>110</sup> Most of the paintings in the exhibition were from major U.S. collections and were intended to demonstrate the great wealth of Flemish paintings already owned by

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<sup>108</sup> Doheny, 1973, 63.

<sup>109</sup> “French Government Loan March 2, 1942- January 1, 1945)”and “French Paintings on Loan from the French Government (December 23, 1945- February 5, 1946).” <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/exhibitions/1945and1946.html>.

<sup>110</sup> “The Worcester-Philadelphia Exhibition of Flemish Painting.” The exhibition was shown in Worcester and Philadelphia; Alfred M. Frankfurter, a major U.S. critic, called it the most significant exhibition of 1939. *Art News*, “The Year in Art: A Review of 1939.” For the exhibition catalogue, see Henri Marceau and Perry Blyth Cott, *The Worcester-Philadelphia Exhibition of Flemish Painting* (Philadelphia: G.H. Buchanan Co., 1939).

public or private collections in the U.S. However a selection of ten “masterpieces” was borrowed from Belgium.

In order to obtain the loans, negotiations on the highest diplomatic levels had taken place without direct involvement of the U.S. government.<sup>111</sup> The U.S. State Department had declined to assist with any facet of the exhibition but the Belgian Embassy in Washington D.C. had intervened. Complications arose when it became apparent that as a matter of protocol, the Belgian King should be invited to the exhibition opening. The Ambassador could not extend the invitation unless the President of the United States agreed to participate. Evidently this hurdle was somehow effectively resolved without the participation of President Roosevelt.

The Flemish exhibition was shown in Philadelphia and Worcester, but ten foreign loans could not be safely returned to Belgium and had to remain in the United States. A third venue was arranged for them at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and then the paintings were to be placed in storage. The Belgian Government then asked the National Gallery to take official custody of the Belgian paintings. The museum agreed, on the basis of the French precedent, and put them on display for three years, presenting them with Flemish selections from the NGA collections and increasing the prestige of American displays.<sup>112</sup>

Government custodianship of European artworks stranded in the U.S. during the war was now officially sanctioned as a responsibility of the NGA. This was an important step in arts management for the federal government of the United States. It demonstrated the power of

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<sup>111</sup> Archival Records, Worcester Art Museum: Flemish Painting File C73/EX/1939 No 3.

<sup>112</sup> “Belgian Government Loan” (February 7, 1943-January 1, 1946).

See also “Flemish Paintings Loaned by the Belgian Government to the National Gallery of Art,” February 7, 1943, <https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-releases.htm>

national or iconic arts as representations of international alliances, the extensive protective abilities of American institutions, and the diplomatic value of the arts as emblems of negotiation and exchange. Quite likely, it drove the point home to politicians that exhibitions of European art were not only prestigious opportunities for mutual goodwill between nations, they were status-enhancing entities, greatly welcomed by ordinary American citizens traveling to Washington D.C. National artworks were symbolic representations of a country's worth and values; it was a demonstration of power for the US to have temporary jurisdiction over them.

Exhibitions of the high arts of Europe brought additional prestige to Washington. They reflected well on the federal government and its power to attract iconic national artworks. It also did not hurt to argue that French and Belgian paintings were "saved from the disasters of the war and allowed to take refuge on American shores."<sup>113</sup> Eventually, an ever-strong United States could compensate for its own lack of arts excellence by offering protection and safety to a weak and faltering Europe. America would soon fight to provide shelter for irreplaceable European artworks and protect values of Western civilization embodied in the arts.

Even though the impetus for the Philadelphia-Worcester exhibition had come from private sources and the federal government had declined to become involved in its negotiations, it was still able to benefit from the transaction. Hosting exhibitions of foreign art on U.S. soil to signal American political power and global connections would soon become a valuable strategy for the federal government.

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<sup>113</sup> Alfred M. Frankfurter, "From David to Toulouse-Lautrec: The Last Century's Founders of This Century's Way of Painting," *Art News*, XI, no. 1, (1941): 17.

## Conclusion

Beginning with the onset of World War II, both NGA and MoMA became more invested in democratizing public access to the arts and promoting them to American audiences for patriotic purposes. Both institutions were sensitive to national diplomatic needs and the power of special exhibitions to sway public opinion. For its part, the federal government was beginning to manipulate international arts and art museums to help resolve America's complicated art problems and resolve its gaping cultural lacunae among nations.

The opening of NGA had given the art image of the U.S. a new momentum and an international power base in fine arts and connoisseurship. The elegant and dignified structure had put the U.S. on a more equal footing with other world nations and connected European culture to the power of the American government. The NGA's European focus balanced out the MoMA's strong stance on modernism and provided the nation with a more dignified cultural presence, asserting that the U.S. did, in fact, possess cultural sophistication, depth, and substance.

Initially the NGA did not require high-visibility exhibition programs to bring in audiences. The grandeur of its building, collections, and location were enough of a public draw. Its annual reports and early press releases from the war years comment repeatedly on increased numbers of visitors. NGA staff did not develop its early exhibitions from scratch unless the projects were dedicated to cultivating private collectors and encouraging them to donate their collections. Given its prestigious stature, the NGA had more than enough offers to host exhibitions that were developed elsewhere.

As wartime needs developed, the NGA became a useful conduit through which the federal government could both conduct international diplomacy and at the same time improve the reputation of the arts in the United States. It was incumbent upon the NGA to host temporary exhibitions that served the government's interests. Finley was able to bend Mellon's founding ideals to fit the nation's immediate war needs. The NGA's exhibition style was more dignified than that of MoMA; it did not develop public taste by creating innovative exhibitions, taking provocative intellectual stances, or serving as a lightning rod for public opinion. There was a strong need for NGA's special exhibitions to encourage support for the war, foster America's homegrown talents, and signal relations with important allies.

David Finley's experiences and knowledge of the inner workings of the federal government made him the perfect intercessor between government agencies and art museums. Under his leadership the NGA gradually became a model for other American museums to follow as they too refocused their efforts on building national morale, patriotism, and democratizing the arts. NGA soon helped its sister art museums become more effective communicators with the federal government. In years to come, NGA would generate its own exhibitions of foreign arts and create its own profiles of the arts of foreign nations in an effort to facilitate soft diplomacy or curry favor by presenting flattering exhibitions of their arts. But it could not do this in its early years.

With the onset of war was clear that the U.S. could no longer remain isolated. Its citizens needed to engage more with the world. One way to accomplish this—to make ordinary people feel comfortable with the foreign -- was for Americans to gain deeper insights into the arts of other nations, particularly countries that served as U.S. allies during the war. Cultural



and some political leaders of the time believed that national arts reflected the ideals and the spirit of a nation-state, thus experiencing foreign artworks in a museum setting could conceivably make its citizens better Americans and more able to cope with a changing world.

Since the public could not observe the war firsthand or easily visit foreign countries, exhibitions of national arts gave cultural insights about foreign countries from works that Americans could observe in the safety of the capital. Not only did exhibitions soothe and distract an uneasy populace; they encouraged Americans to emotionally buy into the war effort and served as a safe window on the world.

## Chapter 3

### Enlisting the Arts: War Themed Exhibitions at NGA and MoMA

Many American art museums, government agencies, military units, businesses, and artists came together as partners between 1941-1945 to build wartime unity using visual channels. NGA and MoMA were especially willing to put their facilities and resources to national use for this purpose. Art museums became bastions of public morale and patriotic communication centers. New kinds of exhibitions became strategies expressing social unity and patriotism. This chapter shows how museums promoted national ideology by making their spaces inviting to military personnel and by featuring exhibitions of combat arts and photography for political persuasion that encouraged Americans “to think the nation.”<sup>1</sup>

Both NGA and MoMA were thoroughly committed to assisting the nation at war but they each did it in somewhat different ways. As the government’s art museum, NGA worked closely with government agencies, branches of the military, and industry to host a series of combat art exhibitions of realistic paintings or drawings by skilled military artists. MoMA focused on creating a series of “photography propaganda shows” that inspired national pride and victory in war and promoted exhibitions that used the arts to help resolve wartime problems.

The years 1941-2 were a foundational time for America’s artists, museums, and art organizations to join together for the war effort. For the most part, they were self-motivated but it helped to have a body of national discourse from the nation’s leaders to guide their

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<sup>1</sup> For listings of war-related exhibitions at NGA and MoMA between the years of 1940-45, see Appendices II and III.

actions. Working out the most effective means of visual communication for the populace at large was a concerted effort that took time to evolve.

President Roosevelt created the Office of War Information immediately after the U.S. formally entered World War II. Its purpose was to provide a connection between the battlefield and civilian communities, and guide citizens on how to think about and support the war. The agency made sure that radio broadcasts, newspapers, posters, photographs, and films provided positive support for the war effort and Allied victory. It also had the power of mandatory censorship over all international and domestic war images.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the government's vision, war-themed exhibitions at MoMA and NGA also reflected censorship requirements. There was a tremendous push to unite all Americans during wartime, yet there was also a need to preserve segregation and other dominant culture social practices to avoid offending mainstream white audiences.

### **Guiding Discourse to Stabilize the Nation and Prepare It For War**

President Roosevelt had not intended the arts or art museums to be particular goals or tools of his administration. He was not himself a lover of the arts and would, in fact, stop supporting them after 1945. He did, however, recognize they could be useful in times of national emergency. His Depression-era programs had put artists back to work; his public inaugurations for NGA (1939) and MoMA (1941) emphasized the social importance of museums

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<sup>2</sup> War photographs were censored and classified in accordance with set policies and there were multiple levels of review. In addition to the Office of War there were military censors. The Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs that will be discussed in Chapter 4 was also involved in monitoring images. See George H. Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War II* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 8-11. See also Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda The Office of War Information 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

and the arts. In unique situations, Roosevelt did a great deal to heighten the prestige of the arts in America and conflate the nation's arts with ideals of freedom and democracy.

At the end of the Great Depression, Roosevelt grappled with the problem of how to continue to productively engage the nation's working artists. He was concerned that FAP was winding down and knew Congress would not continue to support it.<sup>3</sup> He did not wish to be faced with masses of unemployed artists yet again. So, at the end of 1940, he decided to ask the leaders of museums and other cultural institutions to use their facilities to support an annual "National Art Week." The slogan chosen to persuade masses of Americans to support National Art Week was, "A picture for every American household."

The purpose of the week was to urge all Americans to buy inexpensive artworks from living American artists. Roosevelt's staff solicited a cadre of art museum directors to help organize and host the National Art Week. Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was invited to be the National Chairman. Taylor vigorously threw himself into his work and created a multi-faceted and wide-reaching program. He asked museum directors throughout the nation to create community networks in their cities and carefully documented the results.<sup>4</sup>

Taylor urged all art museums to participate, asking them on behalf of the President of the United States to make National Art Week an institutional priority. The purpose of the week was "the promotion of some fifteen hundred exhibitions of contemporary painting,

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<sup>3</sup> Grieve, 2009,154.

<sup>4</sup> For a compendium of Taylor's National Art Week efforts, see Houghton Library Files: Francis Henry Taylor Notes. Harvard University. See especially the Brown Binder with material developed in the office of Mrs. Florence Kerr, Assistant Commissioner for Works, Art Project Promotion Week November 25-December 1, 1940.

sculpture, and other forms of artwork, in which any artist could exhibit works for sale at moderate prices.”<sup>5</sup> This made original American artworks available to the average citizen. The goal of National Art Week was not simply to encourage citizens to enjoy art but also to buy it.

Chicago’s lengthy report on the outcome of National Art Week is a good example of how major cities hierarchically organized into groups to create civic unity.<sup>6</sup> Listed in the top structural rung of the acknowledgement page were “Officers of the National Council” led by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt (Honorary Chairman), Francis Henry Taylor, Robert Woods Bliss (President of the AFA), and Thomas C. Parker (Director of the AFA).<sup>7</sup> The next rung consisted of the “Officers of Illinois Committee” comprising the governor and other state officials. This was followed by an “Executive Committee for Chicago” consisting of another level of high-standing citizens. Enumerated underneath were “Officers of Local Committees,” the “City Advisory Committee,” and the “City Honorary Committee.” There was broad social pressure for anyone who wanted to be seen as involved in civic or arts affairs to participate, and admired individuals were given a prominent place. Social relationships were well defined by the hierarchy.

As a kickoff event the day before Thanksgiving, the prestigious “University of Chicago Roundtable” held a national discussion called “Art and our Warring World.”<sup>8</sup> The Roundtable was a popular weekly radio program that addressed major social questions of the day. Over

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor defined moderate prices as anywhere from \$1-\$100.

<sup>6</sup> Illinois WPA Art Project, Chicago, “National Art Week, November 25-December 1, 1940” Chicago, (1940.) [www.artic.edu/sites/default/files/libraries/pubs/1940](http://www.artic.edu/sites/default/files/libraries/pubs/1940)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> University of Chicago Round Table, “A Radio Discussion of Art and Our Warring World” (Chicago, November 24, 1940, No. 141). This is a 20-page narrative of the radio discussion.

ninety stations carried it to an estimated audience of more than five million people.<sup>9</sup> Its guests included politicians, intellectuals, journalists, businessmen, critics, and college professors.

Distinguished participants in this radio program included Eleanor Roosevelt (America's first lady), Clifton Fadiman (literary critic, poet, and social commentator), Archibald MacLeish (Librarian of Congress), and Louis Wirth (Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago). The discussion emphasized certain ideas about America and the arts that the government wanted its citizens to absorb. The public was encouraged to visit many of the numerous art exhibitions throughout the nation and purchase works for sale. Discussants emphasized that now, more than ever, with the threat of war, Americans needed not only to concentrate on the arts but also use them to strengthen and unify national defense.

"We must ask ourselves what is worth defending in our nation," Eleanor Roosevelt declared, "since without art, life would hardly be worth living."<sup>10</sup> She explained that democracy was a way of life based upon freedom of expression and emphasized, "America's art traditions were there but that they haven't been adequately developed." She hastened to add that America's art traditions were surely unique from any other country in the world because they reflect our democracy. The first lady stressed now that European culture was threatened by war, the United States must carry on Western civilization and increase its sophistication as a nation of art. She noted, "We have been so busy making a living that we have not adequately developed art in our country."<sup>11</sup>

Other discussants at the Roundtable eagerly concurred. Clifton Fadiman said:

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11.

If things continue as they now are in Europe, we shall be forced to be receivers...of a bankrupt European culture. We have reached a critical point in the life of our nation...We are through as a pioneer nation; we are now ready to develop as a civilization...art must become an essential part of our lives, people must support the arts by going to museums, buying the works of living artists, and developing our American culture.<sup>12</sup>

In closing he stated, "Our democratic values are being threatened but we are going to fight back by supporting the arts. All classes of people will participate- not just the wealthy. Art is a method of unifying people; a way of creating national unity...it is important in national defense."<sup>13</sup>

Sociologist Louis Wirth continued, "Anyone can be an artist and appreciate the arts. A thriving national art is a sign of a healthy nation. We must not only defend our country, we must also defend our arts. Art will unify our nation. Popular art can live alongside aristocratic art. Art is not a luxury for the few, it is a necessity for all and a perfectly natural form of human expression."<sup>14</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt concluded the program by saying, "Art never makes our nation soft or weak...instead it makes us strong. We cannot do without art in our lives."

The Roundtable was a message to the nation calling for a new arts paradigm. The discussion had attempted to be comprehensible to the average person, although notions of appreciating the arts, democratic freedom, and national defense were fairly abstract. It was a hard sell to link concepts like art with the notion of national defense although other public

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 20. In this remark, national defense is equated with the defense of a democratic society; the practice of the arts is equivalent to the freedom to create.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 20.

attempts would be made by public officials to reiterate presidential discourse and teach abstract attitudes of patriotism in persuasive visual language.<sup>15</sup>

On January 6, 1941, Roosevelt delivered his State of the Union Address.<sup>16</sup> In it he emphasized the need to preserve “the four essential human freedoms” as the basis of an eventual post-war world. The first of these, freedom of speech, was strongly related to the arts as a form of visual self-expression or pictorial discourse. The other essential freedoms were freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

The Four Freedoms as abstract ideals may have been inspiring to some, but they did not necessarily resonate with the country at large. According to Archibald MacLeish, then Librarian of Congress, “The Four Freedoms” were too abstract for most Americans to remember. According to his calculations no more than 2% of the population queried could identify them all correctly.”<sup>17</sup> It would not be until 1943 that Norman Rockwell painted images of the Four Freedoms and the Saturday Evening Post published them as four individual magazine covers with compelling images that resonated with the populace. In 1943, the Office of War Information launched an exhibition of the painted images on a yearlong nationwide exhibition that toured throughout the country in order to sell war bonds.<sup>18</sup> This exhibition lasted a week or two in each locality and most venues for it were not art museums.

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<sup>15</sup> The Roundtable script/radio text narrative was published in the form of a small, thirty-two-page booklet. It was sent to all subscribers and offered for sale at ten cents a copy at various outlets. It therefore reached educated and interested parts of the populace but had limited exposure.

<sup>16</sup> The American Presidency Project, “Franklin D. Roosevelt 3rd-Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union.” January 6, 1941. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws?pid-16092](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws?pid-16092)

<sup>17</sup> Papers of Archibald MacLeish, Box 52, Collections of the Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>18</sup> Maureen Hart Hennessey and Anne Knutson, *Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 102. This exhibition was co-sponsored by the Saturday Evening Post and the U.S. Department of Treasury.



Other types of discourse also helped orient the nation and prepare it for war. Henry Luce, as publisher of *Life*, *Time*, and *Fortune* magazines and cofounder of what would become the largest and most influential magazine empire in America, felt justified in proclaiming the 20<sup>th</sup> century as “*The American Century*.”<sup>19</sup>

This was the title of an expansive essay Luce published in *Life* February 1941 after being exasperated with America’s indecision on whether to get involved in the war.<sup>20</sup> Written in crisp, easy to understand sentences, the essay had an immediate national impact. Although it lengthy, it was written in urgent language and sections of it were easy for other publications to quote. It made good copy and was republished and circulated widely throughout the United States and in many parts of the world.<sup>21</sup>

The essay was intended to “to rouse Americans out of their slothful indifference and inspire them to undertake a great mission on behalf of what he considered the nation’s core values.”<sup>22</sup> Luce insisted it was time for America to recognize her leadership position in the world and make a commitment to the war for freedom. It was also time for America to develop a sense of internationalism and “send out through the world various extensive technical, economic, and artistic skills... to lift up the rest of mankind from the level of beasts.”<sup>23</sup> It reflected components of the “Four Freedoms Speech” that were ratcheted up for action.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> It was largely because of Luce’s publications that average Americans developed an insatiable appetite for visual or pictorial news.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Random House, 2011), 270.

<sup>21</sup> Henry R. Luce, “The American Century” Reprinted by permission from *Life* in *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1999). Originally published in *Life*, February 1941.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>24</sup> In 1940 Luce was elected to the Board of the MoMA; he did not love art but he was enthusiastic about visual material. It may be no coincidence that the Steichen photography shows were held in 1942, 1943, and 1945.

In June, 1941, Herbert Agar, the Publisher of the *Louisville Courier Journal* wrote a popular editorial for *PM* newspaper called “What We Are Fighting For.”<sup>25</sup> This phrase became a popular slogan of the war, a familiar refrain to be repeated. The handy phrase could be turned into a striking rhetorical question that prompted immediate agreement. Everyone knew the answer by heart: “We are fighting for our freedom... for the arts.” Alfred Barr clipped the *PM* article and kept it in his papers.<sup>26</sup>

### **U.S. Art Museums Organize To Promote Wartime Ideology**

The Pearl Harbor attack on the morning of December 7, 1941 by the Japanese was a clarion call for American art museums. Shocked that the war was now so close to American shores, the Association of Museum Directors (AAMD) convened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on December 20th and 21st, 1941.<sup>27</sup> The leading museum directors present wanted to formulate a national emergency policy for museums. It was evident they must act quickly to protect their collections and buildings from the possibility of attack. True to the bifurcated nature of museums, the guidelines they developed were an interesting blend of the

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<sup>25</sup> *PM* was a liberal-leaning daily newspaper published in New York City by Ralph Ingersoll from June 1940 to June 1948. Chicago millionaire Marshall Field III financed it. The paper borrowed many elements from weekly news magazines.

<sup>26</sup> Clipping from *PM Magazine*, June 10, 1942 [Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Papers, 9.F.39]. See <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/wareffort>

“The Museum and the War Effort: Artistic Freedom and Reporting for “The Cause” An Exhibition organized by MoMA archivists, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2008

<sup>27</sup> *Art News*. “U.S. Museums Face the Wartime World” XL, no .18, (January 1-14, 1941): 9.

ideal and the pragmatic.<sup>28</sup> British war policies involving culture were a major influence on creating these principles.<sup>29</sup>

After discussing how to protect collections, museum directors debated what art museums could do for American morale. Although museums in Britain had been unable to remain open during times of active war, the situation in the U.S. was quite different. The group agreed that at all costs, American museums and their collections must remain open as national symbols of freedom. Henry Taylor stated, "Art is and always has been the visible evidence of the activity of free minds. Great Britain and her Dominions, under the destructive impact of total war, have already shown that art as an expression of the higher values of life is an undeniable factor in a free people's resistance."<sup>30</sup>

Paul Sachs, Associate Director of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, authored a resolution stating:

If, in time of peace, our museums and art galleries are important to the community, in times of war they are doubly valuable. For then, when the petty and trivial fall away and we are face to face with final and lasting values, we...must summon to our defense all our intellectual and spiritual resources. We must guard jealously all we have inherited from a long past, all we are capable of creating in a trying present, and all we are determined to preserve in a foreseeable future. Art is the imperishable and dynamic expression of these aims. It is, and always has been, the visible evidence of the activity of free minds.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Minutes of a special meeting of the Association of Museum Directors on the problems of protection and defense: held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on December 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 1941. Widener Library, Harvard University, Offsite Storage.

<sup>29</sup> Brian Foss, *Art, War, State and Identity in Britain (1939-1945)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.) See also The Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, London, *The War Years and After: Third Report of the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries (Great Britain)*, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948.

<sup>30</sup> *The Museum News*. "Art Museum Directors Hold New York Meeting on War Emergency" XIX, no.13, (January 1, 1942): 1.

<sup>31</sup> "Minutes of a special meeting of the Association of Museum Directors on the Problems of Protection and Defense Held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 20-21, 1941." 28A David Finley Papers, Subject Files 28A2. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Subsequently, a show of lanternslides by Agnes Mongan of Harvard's Fogg Museum drove home the hazards of war.<sup>32</sup> She presented shocking images of the *Grande Galerie* of the *Louvre* full of empty frames, the bombed-out Tate Gallery with skylights lying shattered on its floors, and the nave of the Canterbury Cathedral filled with earth to absorb the shock of explosions.<sup>33</sup> These images emphatically suggested that such disastrous attacks could happen in the U.S.

During the meetings, the following resolutions were adopted by the AAMD with the concurrence of the Officers and Council of the American Association of Museums (AAM):

First, that American museums are prepared to do their utmost in the service of the people of this country during the present conflict; Secondly, that they will continue to keep open their doors to all who seek refreshment of spirit; Thirdly, that they will, with the sustained financial help of their communities, broaden the scope and variety of their work; and Fourthly, that they will be sources of inspiration illuminating the past and vivifying the present; that they will fortify the spirit on which Victory depends.<sup>34</sup>

Museum directors attending the meeting were thus given their marching orders to communicate to community and staff. Highpoints of the meeting and resolution were rapidly communicated to other museums by fliers and brochures and through professional journals.

Since all agreed the first step was to protect the country's most prized collections, a voluntary national committee called the "Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources" (CCCR) put together an emergency handbook called "The Protection of Cultural Resources

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<sup>32</sup> Agnes Mongan was the first female curator in America at the Fogg Museum (1947). In 1969 she became its Director.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas, 1994, 205.

<sup>34</sup> Theodore L. Low, *The Museum as Social Instrument: A Study Undertaken for the Committee on Education of the American Association of Museums* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1942). Published for the American Association of Museums.

Against the Hazards of War.”<sup>35</sup> The 53-page handbook was modeled on best practices gleaned from British and European technical publications. It instructed all institutions to make preliminary surveys of their holdings and divide them into three categories: 1) irreplaceable material of such great importance that its safety must be insured at all costs, 2) material of relative value whose loss would be a serious potential loss, and 3) material whose loss would not be a major handicap. The handbook cautioned that this third category must constitute the bulk of the institution’s holdings. It was simply not possible to save everything in the case of a national emergency.<sup>36</sup>

The handbook gave recommendations for strengthening the building, moving collections, creating safer storage units, or removing the most valuable materials to a depository well away from the dangers of the coast. There were practical suggestions for air raid exercises, reinforcing shelves in interior rooms, raking bombs, finding the best depositories in isolated places, or creating specially constructed ground shelters. The handbook was distributed to museums and libraries throughout the country. A leading conservator at Harvard University wrote a related article on “The Preservation of Paintings in Wartime.”<sup>37</sup> American art museum personnel were rapidly gaining expertise on preservation of arts in conditions of extreme danger, whether before, during or after an attack.

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<sup>35</sup> Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources, “The Protection of Cultural Resources Against the Hazards of War: A Preliminary Handbook.” (National Resources Planning Board, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, February 1942).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> George Stout, “The Preservation of Paintings in Wartime.” *Technical Studies*, Fogg Art Museum, January 1942. The British Museum had already written *Air Raid Precautions in Museums, Picture Galleries, and Libraries* (London, 1939).

The staff of NGA and MoMA immediately went into action. They re-evaluated their collections, quantified their requirements, and took proper air raid precautions. Skylights were covered over, museum windows were taped, and buckets of sand were placed on gallery floors as a precaution in case of incendiary bombs or other fires. Storerooms were sandbagged and boxes of candles were ordered in the event of power failures.<sup>38</sup> Other museums, especially in coastal cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia closely followed their example.

The skylights on the NGA were blacked out nightly and the staff was organized into air-raid brigades. Drills began and were repeated frequently so that units could operate smoothly in the event of an actual air raid. The staff purchased protective air-raid equipment and began to make plans to transfer their premier collections to safer locations.<sup>39</sup>

Both NGA and MoMA took steps to remove their most important collections to places of safety well outside the cities of Washington, D.C. and New York. It was critical to utilize undisclosed locations in isolated places and to secure buildings that were already fireproofed and air-conditioned. Museum security and curatorial staff supervised collections. Protective measures for the galleries and collections were in effect at the NGA until 1945.<sup>40</sup>

“The Museum as Social Instrument,” an influential report published in 1942, was also widely circulated among museums. Its findings urged museums to become more involved in social issues.<sup>41</sup> The author, Theodore Low, stressed that “a living museum must constantly

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas, 1994, 206.

<sup>39</sup> NGA Annual Report, 1942, 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> NGA Annual Report, 1945.

<sup>41</sup> Low, 1942, 8-20. Then a graduate student at Harvard University, Theodore Lowe was appointed as a Field Representative of the AAM for Adult Education while doing this project. He was supervised by Morse A. Cartwright and Lyman Bryson, Teachers College, Columbia University and studied problems of museums in N.Y. He later directed the Walters Gallery from 1946 to 1980.

reinterpret itself in terms of changing social conditions of the present.” He believed that museums should not only become conscious of the public’s needs and wants, they should actively cultivate them.” In his view, American museums were different from European and “the only real justification for the existence of a museum [in America] lies in its degree of usefulness to society as a whole.”

Low believed there was a direct relationship between American museums and freedom. “Museums have the power to make people see the truth ... they have ...propaganda powers which should be far more effective in their truth and eternal character than those of the Axis which are based on falsehoods and half-truths.” They must “combat subversive inroads; they have the power to keep minds happy and healthy.” Low claimed that now was an important time for museums to make themselves permanently useful to society and strengthen the American way of life. Throughout the war, art museums became more conscious of the need to become more useful to society, to sell themselves to the public, and step up their public relations to attract audiences.<sup>42</sup>

The combined recommendations of the AAMD, the CCCR, and the AAM provided a confluence of advice to American art museums that emphasized their collections and exhibitions, so irreplaceable and firmly rooted in American democracy, must be guarded, protected, and controlled. Museum professionals understood it was incumbent upon them to take a stronger stand for patriotism. There was discussion that exhibition rhetoric and design

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<sup>42</sup> Edward L. Bernays, “The Museum’s Job in Wartime.” Council on Public Relations; Paper given at the AAM meetings May 18-19, 1943 and published in *The Museum News* XX, no. 16 (February 15, 1943): 11-12.

should be substantially enhanced to emphasize national goals. Wartime political issues were now fair game for art museums and had now entered the hallowed realm of the arts.

Not all art museums modified their priorities to exhibit art during wartime but many showed tremendous flexibility and willingness to open up their facilities for much broader uses. Urged on by their boards and directors, most museums willingly rearranged their activities and programs to serve the nation and its troops. Some museums made room in their galleries for “soldier canteens” where men on leave could relax and enjoy a respite from the war.<sup>43</sup> The NGA and MoMA hosted programs of war films and promoted weekly dinners for soldiers on leave. They sent art kits and exhibitions to USO Centers and camp recreation buildings so that soldiers and other war workers could relax with, enjoy, or create art in leisure time.<sup>44</sup> With the assistance of the Red Cross, the NGA sent framed reproductions of its paintings to military libraries, hospitals, and day rooms. Three San Diego museums even became Navy hospitals: the Fine Arts Gallery, the Museum of Man, and The San Diego Natural History Museum of Art.<sup>45</sup>

The NGA was proud to see that despite the war its attendance, particularly in military personnel, had been increasing,<sup>46</sup> This was probably because the capital’s largest USO Center was located directly across the street.<sup>47</sup> An article in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* emphasized the

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<sup>43</sup> For examples of canteens or galleries set aside for the duration of the War described at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Rhode Island School of Design, see *The Museum News* XX, no. 9, (November 1, 1942): 4; *The Museum News* XX, no. 14, (January 15, 1943): 1-2; and *The Museum News* XX, no. 20 (April 15, 1943): 5.

<sup>44</sup> USO (United Service Organizations, Inc.) was a nonprofit organization that provided programs and services to service members and their families. See “New York Metropolitan Museum of Art: Exhibitions at Army Camps,” *Museums Journal* 41 (February 1942): 267.

<sup>45</sup> *The Museum News* XX, no. 20 (April 15, 1943): 4-5.

<sup>46</sup> NGA Annual Report, 1943, 27: “The first 6 months of the calendar year 1943 the attendance was 876,460, as compared with 577,360 during the first 6 months of 1942, while the attendance during June 1943— the last month of the fiscal year- was 164,101, compared with 91,810 in 1942.”

<sup>47</sup> Philip Kopper, *America’s National Gallery of Art: A Gift to the Nation* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 227.



dramatic change in NGA attendance: "...in the absence of the former armies of tourists, the bulk of visitors are men and women in uniform and Washington's wartime staffs...The big, oak-finished Founders' Room has become a servicemen's room, equipped with writing desks, magazines, newspapers, free stationery, postcards and so on. Here visitors in uniform can read, write, or if they desire, simply rest and sleep undisturbed."<sup>48</sup> Among the activities that the NGA cited as contributing factors were: Sunday night openings, special exhibitions of contemporary art, the variety and excellence of the free Sunday evening musical concerts, Sunday night suppers for servicemen, and the "Servicemen's Boom," a lounge that furnished a place of refuge and relaxation for many men in the military services, who, especially on weekends, visit the Gallery.<sup>49</sup>

In 1944, the NGA reported that approximately thirty percent of its visitors were men and women in the armed services.<sup>50</sup> Almost all daily activities at the museum were organized and executed with the comfort and entertainment of military personnel in mind. Before each Sunday concert, military personnel were invited to complimentary suppers in the cafeteria, which had been paid for by Gallery staff and friends. The NGA Annual Report noted that it was attempting to operate and maintain its building and grounds at as high a standard as possible with reduced staff cut to a minimum to reduce expenditures to the greatest possible extent during the war period.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "The National Gallery- War Boom in a Museum" *Baltimore Evening Sun*, June 24, 1943. Article by A.D. Emmart. RG 31A1 NGA Legislation: Box 1. National Gallery of Art Archives.

<sup>49</sup> NGA Annual Report, 1943, 27.

<sup>50</sup> NGA Annual Report 1944, 32.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

While NGA programs focused on military personnel, MoMA programs more strongly emphasized the creative application of the arts to solve social problems and the importance of being prepared for national security needs. MoMA wanted the average citizen to be aware of the social, political, and global complexities the world was now manifesting; it used its film and exhibition programs to teach the public about national defense.

John Hay Whitney, President of MoMA's Board and also Chairman of its Motion Picture Division announced in early 1941 in a MoMA press release that the Museum of Modern Art "would now serve as a weapon of national defense."<sup>52</sup> Whitney made a speech in which he described the museum as a vital force in welding solidarity of the Western Hemisphere. The Columbia Broadcasting System broadcast the speech on a nation-wide hookup.<sup>53</sup> MoMA offered film programs to the public on all aspects of the war. Its Film Library was active in reviewing, grading, and translating various foreign films, newsreels, or documentaries dealing with the war and identifying Axis propaganda for the government.

In cooperation with the Army, the MoMA launched a hands-on program of "Soldier Arts" to provide materials for soldier-artists in army camps throughout the country and to utilize the talents of American artists for therapeutic work among disabled soldiers and sailors.<sup>54</sup> The program was under the direction of Trustee James T. Soby who was also head of MoMA's "Armed Services Division." MoMA also raised funds to host parties and events inside

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<sup>52</sup> "John Hay Whitney Announces Museum of Modern Art Will Serve As Weapon of National Defense," February 28, 1941, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archive>. At this time, Whitney was also Chairman of the Motion Picture Division of the government's Office of the Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics, chaired by Nelson Rockefeller. The exhibition activities of this body, which became the OCIAA after it was fully approved by Congress, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> "War Department Approves Museum of Modern Art Soldier Art Program" May 6, 1942, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives> (accessed July 2017)

its building for military personnel of the United Nations, then an embryonic intergovernmental organization in New York being developed to promote international cooperation among allies.<sup>55</sup>

The MoMA education department developed an extensive program of art courses and individual guidance to assist War Veterans.<sup>56</sup>

The NGA essentially provided a comfortable and calming home-away-from-home for servicemen and their families. It emphasized a reserved and formal stance, one that was appropriate to the federal government, its position on the National Mall, and its official character. Public programs at MoMA were dynamic, experimental, and catered to the physical and psychological needs of those involved in the war; they were always searching for better ways to do things. Exhibitions were action-oriented and devoted to technical expertise or citizen problem-solving.<sup>57</sup> MoMA's programs during the 1930's were already primed for visitor engagement; its institutional nature continued as experimental and visitor-oriented, but adapted to the war.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> On January 1, 1942, a small group of nations had signed the United Nations Declaration, pledging to employ their full resources in the struggle against Hitlerism.

<sup>56</sup> "Art For War Veterans." *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* XIII, no. 1 (September 1945).

<sup>57</sup> Some examples are "Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Deployment Unit" (1942), "Norman Bel Geddes War Maneuver Models" (1944) or "Camouflage for Civilian Defense" (1942) "Wartime Housing" (1942), "Useful Objects in Wartime" (1942) "Art Education in Wartime" (1943) or "Children's Painting and the War" (1942), and "Art for War Veterans" (1945).

<sup>58</sup> Apart from exhibitions, MoMA's Department of Film was linked to Nelson Rockefeller's Film Division of the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA). The NGA's wartime activities were also swept up by the curatorial and arts management needs of the Roberts Commission and the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFA&A) Section of the U.S. Army. Both the OCIAA and the MFA&A will be examined separately in chapters 4 and 5, since each subject describes a different approach to utilizing America's art museums.

## “Artists For Victory” and Poster Contests 1941-2

Motivated by the success of National Art Week, patriotism, and past grievances at being under-represented by art museums, twenty-three contemporary artist organizations joined together to form an umbrella organization called “Artists for Victory, Inc.” The group asked the Metropolitan Museum of Art, rather than the MoMA, to host an exhibition of contemporary artworks to be entitled “Artists for Victory.”<sup>59</sup> As stated in the catalogue Preface, they asked the Met “to turn over its facilities to their group so that they could create an exhibition as they themselves [not the Museum] would want it done.”<sup>60</sup> The Met’s director, Frances Henry Taylor, was evidently more than willing, based on his recent chairmanship of National Art Week and his desire to give all American artists an institutional platform to show their work.

The exhibition was scheduled to open on December 7, 1942—exactly one year after the Pearl Harbor attack; its purpose was “to demonstrate to the nation that there is no interruption of creative art in this country during the war.”<sup>61</sup> The exhibition contents were judged, first by a “Jury of Selection” composed of twenty-four artists who belonged to the organization, and then by a “Jury of Awards” consisting of seven arts professionals that were selected by the MET.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, there were over 14,000 entries from 14,000 artists representing forty states.

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<sup>59</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Artists for Victory: An Exhibition of Contemporary American Art Sponsored by Artists for Victory, Inc.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1942), Foreword.

At this time MoMA and the Met had different policies on exhibiting contemporary artists; living artists may have felt that the Met was far more accommodating to them.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Foreword by Henry Francis Taylor.

<sup>62</sup> The “Jury of Selection” consisted of Alfred Barr Jr., the Curator of Paintings and the Associate Director of Prints at the Met, N.Y. Mayor La Guardia, and art museum directors from Philadelphia, Chicago, and Worcester.

Over fourteen hundred paintings, prints, or sculptures were eventually chosen for the exhibition, obviously establishing the point that the arts in America were in great abundance.<sup>63</sup>

“Artists for Victory” had many similarities to National Art Week. It was nationally expansive. Virtually any American citizen who identified as an artist and was a member of a participating artist’s group could enter. The criteria for entry did not limit subject matter; in fact, most of the artworks had very little to do with the imagery of war. Virtually all were scenes of contemporary American life or landscapes, they were not abstract or experimental in style, but very much in the vein of American realism. All objects chosen for exhibition were for sale. Because of its size, the exhibition could not travel but it was given tremendous publicity, congratulated by President Roosevelt, and duly acknowledged in the Congressional Record of March 9, 1943 for its spirit of patriotism and utilizing its talents for the winning of the war.<sup>64</sup> Mayor La Guardia inaugurated the exhibition and the President of the Met complemented “the artists of the country [for] bearing their share in keeping alive the culture of beauty against the destructive forces of barbarism.”<sup>65</sup>

Artists for Victory, Inc. had gathered a number of highly competitive arts organizations, asked them to put aside their differences, and unified them as allies for victory in the face of war. They were able to work together and demonstrate a strong and united front for the arts, and this gave the arts in America a stronger political stature that associated them with values of democracy and freedom.

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<sup>63</sup> “Artists for Victory.” Loan Exhibitions Held 1942-43 L7806. Museum Archives: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Congressional Reports on file.

<sup>65</sup> *New York Times*, December 8, 1942. “Record Art Show Has \$52,000. Prizes.” Clipping in Loan Exhibitions Held 1942-3 L7806. Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

From 1941-1943 there were numerous poster competitions at NGA and MoMA, promoted by the federal government.<sup>66</sup> For example, an NGA exhibition called “War Posters” (January 17-February 17, 1943) was based on themes in Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech. Given a prime location in NGA’s Central Gallery it consisted of three hundred posters selected from a national competition. The project was held under the auspices of Artists for Victory, Inc., with the collaboration of the Council for Democracy and the MoMA. Artists from forty-three states submitted over twenty two hundred designs.<sup>67</sup> They had been given a choice of eight specific themes to illustrate.<sup>68</sup> Images of winning posters were reproduced in newspapers and magazines. After an initial showing at NGA, the exhibition traveled to New York, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere; it was used to boost the sales of war bonds and stamps.

In 1941, the MoMA created a series of its own competitions for photography and posters: “Image of Freedom Photography Competition” and a “National Defense Poster Competition” were two examples.<sup>69</sup> In 1942, it hosted a “United Hemisphere Poster Competition” for artists throughout the Western Hemisphere and went on to sponsor a second “National War Poster Competition that same year. In 1943 it mounted a context called “Magazine Cover Competition: Women in Necessary Civilian Employment.”

The message of these posters was to encourage all classes, factions, or creeds to join together in these times of emergency. Virtually anyone, no matter what his or her status or

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<sup>66</sup> A WPA handbook (1943) called “How to Make and Reproduce Posters” promoted poster making as democratic. The Library of Congress has a collection of 907 posters produced between 1936-43 by various branches of the WPA <http://www.loc.gov/collections/works-progress> (accessed March 2017).

<sup>67</sup> “War Posters” [https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/1943/War\\_posters.html](https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/1943/War_posters.html) (accessed February 2017.)

<sup>68</sup>The designated poster themes were: War Production, War Bonds, the Nature of the Enemy, Loose Talk, Deliver Us from Evil, Slave World or Free World, the People are on the March, and Sacrifice.

<sup>69</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, “Posters for Defense” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8, no. 6, (September 1941): 3-8.

occupation, could make a voluntary contribution to the war. The judges of the poster competitions were generally ordinary citizens or administrators rather than elite arts professionals. Their job was to judge the effectiveness of the poster's communicative message more than its aesthetic expertise.

What the government desired was a strong program of emotive visual imagery that kept the populace committed as America entered and endured the war. Citizens were supposed to see carefully selected, graphic representations of the war that showed the fine job our troops were doing. Such images inspired emotive commitment and brought the urgency of war home. The government wanted a profusion of images, showing multiple numbers of our clean-cut young men at war—looking healthy and resolute—carrying forth the nation's ideals.

Images of America's overwhelmingly *white* military were already prevalent and continuing in magazines, newspapers, and posters. But art museums could disseminate this information in exhibitions with a more intensive aesthetic impact through massed effect. Museums also had the advantage of appearing objective, refined, and separate from government control. Art museums had a special kind of authority all their own, apart from government information. Their exhibitions were aimed at communicating a more aesthetically oriented, generic experience of what constituted the nation and its values.

### **“Thinking the Nation:” NGA’s Exhibitions of Combat Art**

From 1942-45 the NGA presented a steady flow of combat art exhibitions, paintings by certified “military artists” whose works were intended to convey the true nature of war at the front. They showed daily life at military bases as well as the valor and character of troops under

attack. Because military units were segregated and combat artists who traveled with the troops were white, their paintings illustrated a racially restricted heroism.

The same artist who had encouraged Roosevelt to support Federal Art Programs during the 1930's inspired the NGA Combat Arts programs of World War II.<sup>70</sup> George Biddle, a FAP muralist and a realist painter from a socially prominent family, strongly advocated government funding for artists during the war. His suggestions coincided with the president's resolve to get the public behind the war effort, to more fully explain U.S. involvement in the war, and to dramatize the valiant efforts of U.S. troops.

Roosevelt suggested to Biddle that he direct his ideas to the nation's Assistant Secretary of War. Biddle did so and was soon given the go-ahead to start a War Department Art Advisory Committee with leading museum directors David Finley and Henry Francis Taylor. Roosevelt had just created a new Office of War (OWI) that was tasked with controlling the content of war images and making sure the connections between the battlefield and civilian communities were sound.<sup>71</sup> Proper procedure required that the War Department first judge the appropriateness of images and then they could be sent public relations offices of various units for dispersal.<sup>72</sup> Despite Roosevelt's "Four Freedom's Speech" there was still public confusion and uncertainty about the war effort.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Oral history interview with George Biddle, 1963." Archives of American Art. <https://www.aaa.si.edu/...interviews/oral-history-interview-george-biddle> 1296 (accessed July 2016)

<sup>71</sup> The Office of War was subsequently renamed The Office of War Information (OWI).

<sup>72</sup> Roeder, 1993, 8-11.

<sup>73</sup> Winkler, 1978, 2-5. Winkler also discusses how the American public had serious reservations about government propaganda.



In 1942 Francis Brennan, the Director of the Graphic Arts Division of the OWI, put out a search for war artists in the *Art Bulletin*:

Certainly now, in the greatest of all wars, is the time to find out if another Goya is still farming in Iowa, or another Daumier sketches acidly in Vermont. The American People need their artists now – to charge them with the grave responsibility of spelling out their anger, their grief, their greatness, and their justice...The essence of art is freedom. Without it, the world of art could not exist. We know that the enemy is trying to destroy freedom...an unprincipled plan to degenerate and possess men's minds...if this war is lost, no artist worthy of the name will ever paint again in pursuit of his own imagination.<sup>74</sup>

Biddle, who had the responsibility of directing the War Arts Unit, encouraged artists to make pictorial records “about any subject... you feel it is part of the war...try to omit nothing...express if you can, realistically or symbolically the essence and spirit of the war.”<sup>75</sup>

Forty-two combat artists were chosen and sent to twelve theatres of war around the world. They were to travel with white army units, and illustrate whatever that caught their eye as significant.<sup>76</sup> Their work was supposed to capture the emotion and drama of America at war. They were charged with painting the armed forces in action and conveying realistic experiences of what the troops faced. Photography was considered a mechanical medium, inadequate for capturing the spirit or emotion of the war.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.,1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Brian Lanker and Nicole Newnham, *They Drew Fire: Combat Artists of World War II* (New York: TV Books, 2000), Funded by Abbott Laboratories, 5-6.

<sup>76</sup> It would not be until President Truman's Executive Order 9981 of July 26, 1948 that discrimination “on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin” was officially abolished in the armed forces. Black protests against the Army's second-class treatment of black soldiers caused military leadership to begin to address the issue in 1943, but segregation in the armed forces remained official policy until 1948.

<sup>77</sup> *Life* had also been sending out its own war artist correspondents, charging them with painting the war effort in U.S. factories, naval bases, and in the field. It is interesting to see how mass media, advertising and the arts became entwined during this period. It was possible to go back and forth across various mediums to capture the war effort.

One of the problems with the War Artist Unit was a lack of continuous congressional support for it. Congress alternately granted and took away funding for the program. When funding was eliminated, businesses like *Life* magazine and Abbott Pharmaceutical Laboratories stepped in to take up the slack by paying their own visual war correspondents to paint the troops or efforts of war workers back home. Other government agencies such as the departments of Treasury and War had war budgets as did the public relations sections of military branches and they too intermittently supported war artists.

Pictorial magazines like *Life* had a major stake in promoting war images in order to sell magazines. *Life* took the initiative to sponsor a juried exhibition of paintings and drawings open to all personnel in the Army, Navy, Air Corps, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The winners were featured in an art exhibition called "An Exhibition by Men of the Armed Forces."<sup>78</sup> This exhibition contained one hundred sixty-seven paintings by artists who had worked in eight different theatres of war. It premiered at the NGA in summer of 1942 and set the stage for a deluge of similar exhibitions.

With the cooperation of the War Department, *Life* went on to commission nine American artists to paint eyewitness accounts of the war. The results of their work, "War Art," premiered at the NGA and were heavily promoted. According to director David Finley, the exhibition was "the only known continuous record in art of the war to date...painted by

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<sup>78</sup> "Art Exhibition by Men of the Armed Forces." July 5, August 2, 1942. Ground floor, Central Gallery. [https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/1942/armed\\_forces.html](https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/1942/armed_forces.html). (accessed January 2017).

America's foremost artists...[the paintings] will become a valuable addition to the nation's art treasures when given to the Government."<sup>79</sup>

Abbott Laboratories, a large pharmaceutical company headquartered in Chicago also had a major economic stake in the war effort. It was actively shipping drugs and supplies to the medical corps overseas. It focused its research on medical solutions to benefit America's fighting men. Its director of advertising made an agreement with the War Department to sponsor an art collection that would serve as a "comprehensive record of war activities, both at home and on the battlefield."<sup>80</sup> Abbott Laboratories sponsored two combat art exhibitions at NGA: "Paintings of Naval Aviation" (1943) and "Paintings of Naval Medicine" (1944). These exhibitions, prominently displayed in the nation's capital, were obviously good public relations for Abbott Laboratories.

"The Army at War: A Graphic Record by American Artists" (1944) was another elaborate example of this type of exhibition, done apart from Abbott Laboratories. Elinor Morgenthau, wife of Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. described the appeal of the pictures in the Foreword to the catalogue.<sup>81</sup> She felt the works definitely

... bring home in their simple, powerful workmanship and their subject matter, the straight-thinking and well-organized hard-hitting Army of today... "No matter how faithfully the camera and radio may reproduce the color, form, and sound of warfare, it is still the artists who brings to us the emotions and the spirit, putting heart and soul behind the mechanical embodiments

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<sup>79</sup> NGA Untitled Press Release Friday, June 18, 1943. <https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-releases.html> (accessed July 2017)

<sup>80</sup> "Abbott Laboratories War Art: Voices Education Project" [voiceseducation.org/content/abbot-laboratories-war-art](http://voiceseducation.org/content/abbot-laboratories-war-art) (accessed July 2016)

<sup>81</sup> Very often wives served as arts spokespeople for their high-ranking husbands; husband and wife pairs were often listed on acknowledgement pages of exhibitions catalogues.

captured by science...Courage, skill and watchfulness – these are attributes found in good soldiers and good artists, in good fighting and good painting.<sup>82</sup>

Her comments were a guide to enhance and direct viewer aesthetic appreciation.

The titles of the paintings in were gripping, human, and poignant.<sup>83</sup>

According to J.L. McCain, Vice Admiral U.S.N., Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, an aesthetic of authenticity was absolutely crucial. “The images were considered permanent records of planes, ground crews and flyers and were considered factual historical contributions. Artists were required to accurately show details of equipment and intimate details of training. “ Ross T. McIntire, Vice Admiral, (MC) U.S.N. Surgeon General, United States Navy, emphasized, “In this war, to a much greater degree than in any previous conflict, Americans want to know “how things are going.” They “are eager not only for current news on battle campaigns but for true, releasable information concerning the latest piece of ordinance, advances in aviation, developments in surface strategy.”<sup>84</sup> The requirement for exact factual details of equipment and training obliged war artists to create their images from still photographs.

The strikingly realistic detail had its impact and was riveting for Americans who wanted to share in the war. It may be that images of combat were the closest contact with the reality

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<sup>82</sup> *The Army At War: A Graphic Record By American artists: Paintings and Drawings Lent by the War Department to the United States Treasury Department.* The Art Institute of Chicago, 1944, 8-9.

[www.artic.edu/research/1944exhibition/history](http://www.artic.edu/research/1944exhibition/history). Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, Jr. was the Chairman of the project and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the honorary chairman. In fact, a number of women were active on this project, indicating that perhaps their husbands were tending to matters other than art.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* Painting titles listed in parenthesis: those concerned with food (K Rations, Army Cook, Officers Mess Near Accra); with action (Halt During Maneuvers, Penetrating the Jungle, Assault Troops Take Cover); with fear (Questioning a Prisoner of War, Crash Landing, Meet the Enemy); with relaxation (Crap Game in a Hangar, Reading the Home Paper, A Fighter Hits the Sack); with demonstrations of skill (Machine Gunner, Bringing in the Ammo, Hand over Hand); with moments of sentiment (First Uniform, Rolling out the Beach Gear, A Wet Sunday Afternoon); with new technology (New Armored Vehicles, ...and Keep Your Powder Dry, Man in the Oxygen Mask.), or exotic foreign lands (Still Life at Guadalcanal, Camp at Anchorage, Street Scene in Noumea).

<sup>84</sup> *The Abbott Collection: Paintings of Naval Aviation.* (Chicago Art Institute: April 26-May 30, 1944.) Introduction. [www.artic.edu/research/1944exhibition/history](http://www.artic.edu/research/1944exhibition/history) (accessed July, 2017)

of war that people at home might experience. Whether or not this was the case, combat art exhibitions were strong inducements for Americans “to think the nation” and fostered feelings of nationalistic pride that usually did not include non-white ethnicities.

Yet, by 1944, needing additional reinforcements, various branches of the military were actively recruiting Negro servicemen. The Coast Guard bombarded the black press with ads offering new recruits attractive opportunities<sup>85</sup> Jacob Lawrence, by then recognized as a major African-American painter, joined the Coast Guard. He had been celebrated in a solo show at MoMA in October 1944 that consisted of his epic sixty-piece “Migration of the Negro Series” and eight paintings of Coast Guard subjects that depicted Negro soldiers integrated with whites.<sup>86</sup> Towards the end of the war, there were more pragmatic attempts to provide greater inclusion for African-Americans in the lower levels of the military, but there were also stronger forces to maintain the status quo of segregation.

During wartime, differences of class, religion, ethnicity, race and gender were minimized to ensure greater participation.<sup>87</sup> Propagandists created different images for different groups or audiences or show greater inclusion with the understanding that these were special circumstances but after the war the status quo of exclusion would return. MoMA’s photographic exhibitions supporting the war also reflected a strong emphasis on mainstream white culture.

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<sup>85</sup> John Ott, “Battle Station to MoMA: Jacob Lawrence and the Desegregation of the Armed Forces and the Art World,” *American Art* 29, no. 3, Fall, 2005, 64.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 60. Lawrence was not represented in the “Army at War” exhibition nor did a catalogue document the 1944 exhibition.

<sup>87</sup> Roeder, 1993, 51

## MoMA's Exhibitions of Photographic Persuasion

Interestingly, the MoMA did not present art exhibitions of paintings or drawings by contemporary military artists. Instead, it took the theme of war and applied it to the emerging medium of photo-journalistic photography. MoMA had created a new curatorial Department of Photography in 1940 and was interested in promoting the new and emerging artistic medium.<sup>88</sup> Though innovations were made in applying photojournalism to the media of exhibitions, MoMA's presentations suffered from the same problem of limited social inclusion, as did the exhibitions of combat-paintings at NGA.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, President Roosevelt set up an Office of War Censorship where military photographers submitted exposed film to field censors who classified the images. Photographs had to pass several rounds of inspection; even complete layouts had to be reviewed before publication. The military also had its own censors. Other government agencies such as the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs were also involved in monitoring images.<sup>89</sup> There were thus various degrees of image censorship during the war.

Some of the most crowd-pleasing and visually arresting exhibitions at MoMA during the war years were a series of carefully crafted photography shows that emphasized America's idealism and prowess in war but did it by manipulating images. These exhibitions consisted of greatly enlarged photographs that were juxtaposed with text to make impassioned rhetorical statements about the war. The installations utilized the layout techniques of *Life*, but adapted

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Griffin, "The Great War Photographs: Constructing Myths of History and Photojournalism." In *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography*, Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 122-157.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-11.

them to the exhibition medium. Photo-journalistic images were blown-up many times for visual impact so visitors would emotively enact the experience of walking through panoramic vistas of a beloved, pastoral America or shockingly confront enlarged war scenes with “ a you are there” immediacy.<sup>90</sup>

Monroe Wheeler, Director of MoMA’s Exhibition and Publication departments, asked Edward Steichen, a prominent photographer with military experience and acclaim in World War I, to curate a photography exhibition on the subject of American national defense. Steichen, who had been told he was too old to re-enlist but was nevertheless newly commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve, had the experience and talents for the job.<sup>91</sup> The working titles for the exhibition were “Arsenal of Democracy” or “Panorama of Defense” but as the exhibition took shape subsequent to Pearl Harbor, it was re-named “The Road to Victory: A Procession of Photographs of the Nation at War, Directed by Lt. Comdr. Edward Steichen, U.S.N.R.”<sup>92</sup>

The exhibition team consisted of several key individuals. Monroe Wheeler was MoMA’s in-house curator and coordinator; he was the glue that kept the team members together. Steichen and Wheeler asked Herbert Bayer, a German émigré artist/designer, who had been active in the German *Bauhaus* movement and worked on MoMA exhibition designs before, to

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<sup>90</sup> The popular program “You are There” with Walter Cronkite first aired on radio in 1950 and was converted into television in 1953.

<sup>91</sup> Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 142. Steichen’s first orders were to complete “Road to Victory.”; See also Griffin, 1999, 122-157.

<sup>92</sup> Monroe Wheeler, “Road to Victory, A Procession of Photographs of the Nation at War, Directed by Lt. Comdr. Edward Steichen, U.S.N.R.” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* VIX, nos. 5-6, (June, 1942): 2-20.

develop a plan for the installation.<sup>93</sup> Poet Carl Sandburg, Edward Steichen's brother-in-law, agreed to write the exhibition text or narrative. Wheeler coordinated the key members, wrote for the catalogue, and functioned as the exhibition spokesperson.

Steichen, Beyer, and Sandburg were all accomplished and mature artists. They were all professionally motivated to make the exhibition a serious artistic endeavor. Most probably they were encouraged to create an outstanding, innovative exhibition since MoMA had made its reputation upon developing innovative interpretive displays.

"Road to Victory" was a dramatic compilation of wartime photographs by professional photojournalists.<sup>94</sup> Working from authorized images made by photographers from all branches of the military, and drawing from the archives of the Farm Security Administration, Tennessee Valley Authority, *Life* magazine, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and the Associated Press, Steichen selected one hundred and fifty of what he considered to be the most iconic examples of mainstream American life and worked with Sandberg and Beyer to forge a patriotic exhibition storyline.<sup>95</sup> Their plan was to juxtapose compelling images of representative figures and landscapes that made large-than-life statements about the positive qualities of American life. By mounting these images in various sizes and strategic positions throughout the exhibition, the artistic goal was to achieve the strongest visual impact. Steichen chose photos for visual impact and subject matter, depending upon what the story needed. All photographs

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<sup>93</sup> Steichen and Beyer were both visually oriented people with long experience in the art department of Conde Nast. Beyer had previously designed MoMA's major Bauhaus exhibition (1939). He had also worked in the fields of advertising and industrial graphics.

<sup>94</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Steichen's Road to Victory" *Exposure* 18, no. 2 (1981): 38-48.

<sup>95</sup> "Museum of Modern Art Opens Road to Victory Exhibition Arranged by Edward Steichen and Carl Sandburg," 1942, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives> (accessed July 2017)



were represented as anonymous; the point was not to highlight individual artists but to build a coherent, idealized truth about America. The team was building a visual rhetoric to inspire patriotic resolve in the audience<sup>96</sup>

Art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski calls this exhibition and others like it “Installations for Political Persuasion” and emphasizes that at the time white audiences saw them as inspiring and honest portraits of America.<sup>97</sup> In these exhibitions photographs and text were dramatically combined. At just the right moment in “Road to Victory,” the spectator confronted images of farmers plowing fields and carrying corn, a young girl with a calf, and a farm couple laughing. Sandburg’s text read, “The earth is alive. The land laughs. The people laugh. The fat of the land is here.” At another point in the exhibition was the incredulous caption, “It can’t happen to us. We’ve got two oceans protecting us. The United States is not in the slightest danger of invasion.” Then at the next turn there was a photograph of destroyed Pearl Harbor and underneath it an enlarged photograph of the Japanese ambassador laughing.<sup>98</sup> Such a configuration was meant to cause viewers to react strongly; it may have even fueled prejudice against the Japanese.

Bayer took the photos and texts Steichen selected and created an avant-garde installation to provide maximum visual impact.<sup>99</sup> He removed all of MoMA’s interior walls to create a sense of spaciousness; within it he carved out a predetermined path for visitors to travel that featured panoramas of land and American people. The installation was daring and

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<sup>96</sup> Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950’s America* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 44.

<sup>97</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 214.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

unexpected; enormous photo-blowups were juxtaposed against one another, prints might be angled off on walls or suspended in various directions; the spectator was led up a raised ramp to get a dramatic vista. Such a vivid display of images, conjuring up the visceral urgency of war, was a major incentive for viewers “to think the nation” the way the government wanted.

Bayer, who had vast experience creating schematic fields of vision, was interested in creating a total environment that enhanced the relationship between viewer and object.<sup>100</sup> He suspended images floor-to-ceiling at oblique angles. He wanted to extend the viewer’s vision by creating dynamic unexpected arrangements, dramatic-close-ups or vast vistas that would physically involve the spectator and lead them through a series of changing controlled experiences in space and time that would affect their emotions and drive the narrative of the exhibition home.<sup>101</sup> “Road to Victory” was such a success in terms of media attention and attendance numbers, that MoMA went on to produce several more exhibitions of the same type.<sup>102</sup>

Steichen’s next exhibition was called “Airways to Peace.” The idea for it seems to have been generated by Monroe Wheeler who was inspired by a best-selling book called *One World* by famed politician Wendell Wilkie.<sup>103</sup> The book was a travelogue of Wilkie’s 1943 seven-week air tour around the world in which he emphasized a unique view of the globe as

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<sup>100</sup> Gwen F. Chanzit, *From Bauhaus to Aspen: Herbert Bayer and Modernist Design in America* (Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1987), 111-117.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>102</sup> Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 15. The Office of War Information took smaller versions of the Road to Victory exhibition on the road (to Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, Honolulu, Providence, Davenport Iowa, Brookings South Dakota, Northfield Minnesota, and Carbondale Illinois (not necessarily in this order).

<sup>103</sup> Wilkie was a failed 1940 Republican presidential candidate against incumbent Franklin D. Roosevelt. *One World* was on the New York Times Best Seller List for four months.

interconnected.<sup>104</sup> Continents and oceans were no longer separate; they were instead part of a continuous and all-inclusive whole. Wilkie wrote that it was important for America to see the world differently and plan for eventual peace on a worldwide basis or the entire species would be in peril. He urged Americans to reorient themselves to a “new age” because only then will it be possible “to preserve our cultural differences yet live in peace with other nations and cultures.”<sup>105</sup> The purpose of the show was “to assist the layman to orient himself in relation to the air age.”<sup>106</sup> The exhibition literally put the U.S. at the center of the world, celebrating the fact that we were now “the world nation, whether we like it or not.”<sup>107</sup>

New concepts of “air-age geography” were being depicted in World War II military maps and would later affect Cold War cartography. Timothy Barney, a professor of rhetoric and communications, has argued that America discovered it could remake the world in its own image during World War II and increase its international power with the science of Cold War cartography and military maps reconfigured to emphasize the centrality of the U.S.<sup>108</sup> Like maps, the “Airways to Peace” exhibition interpretively put the U.S. at the center of nations and reconfigured America as the world’s most predominant focal point.<sup>109</sup>

Bayer envisioned the display as a giant cartographic space with vast contour lines, diagonal cords signifying longitude and latitude were stretched across the galleries, and other

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<sup>104</sup> Wendell L. Wilkie, *One World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1943).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>106</sup> Monroe Wheeler, “A Note on the Exhibition Airways to Peace: An Exhibition of Geography for the Future” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*. XXI, no. 1 (August 1943): 22-24.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Timothy Barney, *Mapping the Cold War: Cartography and the Framing of America’s International Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-36.

futuristic elements such as moveable and interactive globes and film from a helicopter that gave the sensation of physical soaring. Wilkie wrote the exhibition narrative as a travelogue and the design reinforced it or supported it with birds-eye-views. Monroe Wheeler functioned as MoMA curator bringing all aspects of the installation together. The centerpiece of the exhibition was what the museum called an enormous “outside-in” cut-away globe, fifteen feet in diameter that visitors could physically enter into; according to *Newsweek*, this globe extended the visitor’s eye of vision and revealed “the entire world in at a glance.”<sup>110</sup> Another very special feature was the loan by President Roosevelt, of his “Fifty-Inch Globe” weighing more than five hundred pounds that had been presented to the President personally by the U.S. Army the previous Christmas as a unique instrument of military strategy.”<sup>111</sup>

The text of the exhibition discussed mapmaking over time, and emphasized the egregious errors that Germany and Japan had made in designing maps for propaganda. It noted their mistakes would ultimately make them lose the war, as opposed to the U.S. Army Map Service, that produced true and accurate strategic maps for American pilots.<sup>112</sup> While “Airways to Peace” was less popular with the public as “Road to Victory” had been and did not have its same emotional impact, the installation elements were propagandistic and innovative.<sup>113</sup> It showed that MoMA was flexing its power to influence public opinion or manage public

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<sup>110</sup> Wheeler, 1943, 21.

<sup>111</sup> “Loan of President’s Globe Extended to Close of Airways to Peace Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art,” October, 1943, <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/press-archives> (accessed May 2017).

<sup>112</sup> Wheeler, 1943, 21.

<sup>113</sup> Staniszewski, 1998, 234.

perception by placing visitors inside a new national space, making the abstract become more concrete and understandable, and engulfing the visitor inside a new age.

Monroe Wheeler emphasized this strategy repeatedly in his descriptions of the exhibition:

The purpose of the exhibition...is to assist the layman to orient himself [sic] in relation to the air age. The evolution and new uses of the airplane have made this a global world, and changed our way of looking at the world...Not only in idealistic theory but in actual fact the world today is one unit...No national boundary can have the importance it had in the past...Mr. Wilkie has pointed to the German's lack of the global concept as the basic flaw in their strategy. They planned their conquest on Mercator maps and relegated the United States to the fringe of the world. To demonstrate this and other essential factors of an air-age war, an important section of the exhibition, consisting of spheres and "outside-in" hemispheres shows Germany's tragic misinterpretation of geo-political theory."<sup>114</sup>

While we may never know whether visitors actually internalized the collective intensions of Wheeler, Beyer, Wilkie, and Steichen after experiencing the exhibition, the aim of the creators was clear, as were the goals and aspirations of the exhibition:

To suggest a new national geopolitical identity for America by putting Americans at the helm.

A follow-up exhibition that opened just prior to the end of the war was "Power in the Pacific: Battle Photographs of our Navy in Action on the Sea and in the Sky."<sup>115</sup> Captain Steichen, who was assisted by several Navy lieutenants, again assembled the exhibition but used Navy personnel for its implementation in order to make the representation more authentic. One lieutenant designed the installation and another wrote the interpretive text. The images reproduced official Navy photographs in black and white and color in dramatic sequence and recreated the tremendous size of an aircraft carrier plus many of its battle

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<sup>114</sup> Wheeler, 1943.

<sup>115</sup> The dates were January 23-March 20, 1945.

accouterments. At one point, “the spectator would seem to be positioned only a few hundred feet above the flight deck of a Jap carrier.”<sup>116</sup> This was a last vicarious experience of the war emphasizing American victory, establishing power in the Pacific.

These projects were the prototypes for MoMA’s later, iconic exhibition called “The Family of Man.”<sup>117</sup> This 1955 exhibition emphasized commonalities of experience of the human condition throughout the world and had a profound effect on Cold War America. Eric Sandeen, Professor of American Studies and author of a book-length analysis of the exhibition argues that the visual economy that that supported “The Family of Man” was established during World War II when scores of photographers confronted the war and audiences learned to rely on them for views of unfamiliar but important scenes in foreign lands.<sup>118</sup> In these representations sentimental humanism trumped racial or class injustices in American society.<sup>119</sup> The United States Information Agency (USIA) later traveled “The Family of Man” in five different versions throughout the world, for a period of seven years, wishing to emphasize a totalizing world unity, the values held in common, and the humane global leadership of the United States.<sup>120</sup>

There was hardly a time between 1942-1945 when wartime art exhibitions were absent from NGA or MoMA schedules. Graphic war-themed exhibitions were ubiquitous; the public never tired of them. After showings at these premier locales, wartime exhibitions often went

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<sup>116</sup> “Museum of Modern Art Exhibits Official Photographs of Naval Sea and Air Action in the Pacific,” January 23, 1945, <https://www.moma.org/research-learning/archives/press-archives> (accessed July 2017)

<sup>117</sup> See Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950’s America* (University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. The Family of Man covered a much broader representation of ethnicities or world cultures than the images in NGA and MoMA wartime exhibitions.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>120</sup> For another point of view and overview of critical responses to the “Family of Man” exhibition see Fred Turner, “The Family of Man and the Politics of Attention in Cold War America,” *Public Culture* 24, no. 1 (2012), 55-84.

on national tours to museums in other major cities that requested them. The MoMA Bulletin boasted in 1942 that fifteen wartime exhibitions were sent to nine-three U.S. cities after being shown in New York.<sup>121</sup> These exhibitions were intended to appeal to male and female audiences and art dealers and galleries probably saw a new market for selling moderately priced pictures to male clients.

Combat art exhibitions infused mainstream America's morale and were enthusiastically welcomed by all branches of the military. They were believed to help enlisted men feel their work, whether mundane camp activities or high-level military action, was important to the nation. The idealization of the common man in military service was very much a part of exhibition imagery. It was to the military's advantage to emphasize images of the soldier in daily life to maintain military morale. There was always a fine line to walk in depicting races and statuses.

Each branch of the military service had its own public relations department that was anxious to present a positive image of its particular division, and sometimes there was competition in the ranks. The Department of Defense was under the Executive Branch and the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not exist until after World War II so the individual military branches were more or less on their own. The Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and Air Force all had their own separate intelligence agencies and their own public relations units.

The production of NGA's "combat art exhibitions" came from government-related groups or individuals outside of the museum, not within it. "Combat-art" exhibitions required a

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<sup>121</sup> Museum of Modern Art, "The Museum and the War" *The Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art* 10 no. 1, (1942).

groundswell of patriotic collaboration between various government agencies, corporations, civic organizations, special-interest groups, and museum representatives. They required a body of influential people on the outside, often politically motivated, with a common concern, who came together to support the project, make it financially feasible, socially responsive, and politically useful. Art museums were used to this kind of collaborative compromise. NGA was amenable to hosting the exhibitions but the work of creating them primarily came not from arts specialists inside NGA but from outside individuals and organizations.

By contrast, the impetus for MoMA exhibitions came from within the institution and focused more strongly on the innovative aesthetic nature of the exhibition product. MoMA took the emerging medium of artistic photography and selected a seasoned war veteran, designer, and public communicator to produce a startling and provocative message. These exhibitions required teamwork by artist-specialists who worked together to manipulate aesthetic content and impact. Their object was to create a harmonious view of America, to evoke maximum aesthetic response, and control the aesthetic product from beginning to end.

## **Conclusion**

Art museums and the war-themed exhibitions they created became an integral part of patriotic American life in wartime. Exhibition discourse, both printed and visual, had the capability of shaping and unifying mainstream public opinion during a difficult and potentially divisive time. Both NGA and MoMA offered a respite for servicemen and moral support for the general public. Both museums showed flexibility and a willingness to cooperate. The war-



related exhibitions they created were intended to serve as accurate records of war, reinforce American morale, and keep the population focused on wartime unity.

Yet these exercises in following the course of war and “thinking the nation” also illustrated a racially restricted heroism or national ideal that included discriminatory practices. The exhibitions appealed to white mainstream audiences and brought unity to those populations. What museums did not or could not address, as instruments of the State, were social issues of whose nation, who counts, or who gets over-looked in the explosive issue of race.

The repetitive yet varied nature of these exhibitions proves that the public never tired of them. NGA and MoMA would not have repeated them throughout the war had audience reaction been lukewarm. There was strong encouragement to create these exhibitions from the federal government. These exhibitions traveled in duplicate versions around the country and offered national audiences an opportunity for glimpses of the war effort. Their creation helped integrate and unify social classes and coalesce public attitudes about the war. Such exhibitions suggested that art museums and the arts were no longer elitist and had met the common man more than halfway. They were one more strategy to keep the urgency of war and the necessity for patriotic unity in front of the public at large. Exhibitions reinforced a nationalistic notion of “thinking the nation.” In the process, problems of social inequality were ignored but not erased.

What became of the profuse collections of combat art canvases when the war ended? The Smithsonian did not wish to accept combat art paintings if the governance of the organizing museum (NGA) had been by a separate Board of Trustees. The armed forces were not

integrated into a single unit until 1948. After the war, President Truman established a sub-committee to consider forming a National Military Museum to commemorate World War II and accept and feature combat art collections.<sup>122</sup> Museum directors and military leaders debated what should be done with these artworks.<sup>123</sup> A Bill was separately introduced into Congress to establish a National Air Museum (HR 5144) that Truman signed; there was concern among the committee that this could conflict with a proposed National Military Museum. Finally, the committee recommended that each branch of military service begin collecting its own materials.

The next chapter will illustrate how American art museums became involved with the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA). This U.S. government agency lasted through the duration of the war to ensure democracy and security throughout the Western Hemisphere and prevent the encroachment of Nazi or communist sympathies. It asked U.S. art museums to develop positive exhibitions of national art to further mutual understanding inside the Western Hemisphere, dissolve harmful cultural stereotypes, and demonstrate the importance of democracy to Inter-American countries. If exhibitions of national arts could convey the spirit or essence of a people and visual arts were indeed a universal language, then perhaps the arts could be used to win the hearts and minds of foreign citizens in Latin America to the American way of life.

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<sup>122</sup> *The Museum News* 23, no. 20 (April 15, 1946), 1.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* Members of the committee were Paul Sachs (Fogg Museum), Lenox Lohr (Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago), Samuel E. Morison, Captain USNR and professor of history, Grace Morley (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), Rear Admiral Vincent Murphy (Director of Naval History, Naval Department), Major General Edward M Powers (Army Air Forces) and Major General Edwin F. Harding of the Historical Division (War Department).

## Chapter 4

### Exhibitions of Diplomacy: Nelson Rockefeller and the Office of Inter-American Affairs

In 1941 President Roosevelt established the Office for Commercial and Cultural Relations between American Republics (OCIAA) and appointed Nelson Rockefeller as its Coordinator.<sup>1</sup> The purposes of the OCIAA were “to provide for the development of commercial and cultural relations between the American Republics... increase the solidarity of this hemisphere, and further the spirit of cooperation between the Americas in the interest of hemispheric defense.”<sup>2</sup> The U.S. had not yet entered the war but Roosevelt was motivated to establish this new agency because he was worried about national security and Axis infiltration into key parts of Latin America.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will show how Nelson Rockefeller integrated art and culture into official government policy through the use of exhibitions.

Nelson Rockefeller was a critical intermediary between art museums and government during World War II. A commanding and charismatic figure, Rockefeller believed it was possible to use the arts to create more favorable conditions for democracy in Latin America, eradicate Nazi propaganda, and gain the support of various South American countries by establishing a series of economic and cultural programs.<sup>4</sup> In his view, the arts could bring diverse peoples

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<sup>1</sup> Rockefeller’s appointment was made in 1940 and financed by the president’s emergency fund. The executive order clarifying the position came later. See Richard Norton Smith: *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller*. (New York, Random House, 2014), 143. OCIAA is sometimes referred to as CIAA, Office for Inter-American Affairs. OCIAA was renamed OIAA in 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Executive Order 8840 Establishing the Office of Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. July 30, 1941. “ The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16142> (accessed May 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch, “Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940-1946) and Record Group 229” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86, no. 4 (2006): 785-806.

<sup>4</sup> *Addresses of Nelson Rockefeller, 1940-44*. CIAA, Volume 1 (Summer, 2016). Rockefeller Archive Center.

together and promote cultural understanding.<sup>5</sup> His long-standing interest in art museums and his ability to influence others resulted in the development of key OCIAA art exhibitions that influenced the Department of State in independently developing its own exhibitions.

Rockefeller inspired U.S. art museums to create exhibitions for diplomacy and created a pathway into government channels.

### **The Philosophy and Personality of Nelson Rockefeller**

Born into one of America's most powerful families, Nelson Rockefeller was a captivating politician and consummate strategist with a passion for the arts. He had served on the boards of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the MoMA, and was fascinated with the potential and capabilities of art museums. By 1935 he was Director of Rockefeller Center, a towering commercial complex in the center of Manhattan. By 1939, he had traveled extensively throughout Mexico and South America, utilizing connections with the family oil business, and worked his way up to becoming President of MoMA's Board of Trustees.

Rockefeller grew up with a mandate of personal power mixed with family wealth and patronage. The Rockefeller legacy was entwined with two types of charitable traditions in America. The first was a tradition of "public philanthropy" that encouraged charitable institutions, rather than government agencies, to reinforce national economic ties and cultural relationships with foreign countries in order to facilitate high-level diplomatic relationships.<sup>6</sup> The second was a tradition of "family philanthropy" that began with his grandfather's founding

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<sup>5</sup> Cramer and Prutsch, 2006, 786.

<sup>6</sup> Ninkovich, 1981, 8.

of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913, “to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world.”<sup>7</sup> Both traditions served America in its mission to economically and culturally expand into the rest of the world, without directly taxing the federal government.<sup>8</sup>

Philanthropic organizations supporting arts and culture had developed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century so the U.S. federal government had less reason to be concerned about cultural relations until 1938.<sup>9</sup> The situation changed when philanthropists and private foundations begin having their own special interests that were no longer congruent with the government’s political agenda.<sup>10</sup> By this time, philanthropic foundations had become more geographically limited in the scope of their donations, and many of them favored innovative programs confined to their own interests.<sup>11</sup>

The powerful Rockefeller Foundation had undergone several changes in focus since its inception.<sup>12</sup> Under John D. Rockefeller, Sr., it had concentrated on matters of public health and education. Under Nelson Rockefeller’s father, John D. Rockefeller Jr., the attention of the Foundation shifted to economic or agricultural studies that enriched the development of foreign countries and the U.S.<sup>13</sup> By 1928, the goals of the Rockefeller Foundation veered towards museums and the Humanities.<sup>14</sup> The Foundation also operated in a supporting capacity

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<sup>7</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Website, <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org> (accessed January, 2017)

<sup>8</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000), 187.

<sup>10</sup> Ninkovich, 1981, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation was established in 1913 to promote “the well being of mankind throughout the world.” <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/about-us/our-history> (accessed January, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Delpar, *Looking South: The Evolution of Latin Americanist Scholarship in the United States, 1850-1975* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 112.

for the Rockefeller family's major business, Standard Oil Company, and was especially active with promoting philanthropic projects in oil-producing countries.<sup>15</sup>

In 1940, motivated by the personal aspirations of their new generation, Nelson Rockefeller and his four brothers decided to create their own non-profit foundation which they called "The Rockefeller Brother's Fund." The activities of the fund were specifically directed towards giving grants to MoMA and other non-profit cultural institutions. The fund was especially useful to Rockefeller when President Roosevelt asked him to head the Office of Coordinator of Latin American Affairs.

As Coordinator of the OCIAA Rockefeller convinced MoMA, NGA, and other U.S. art museums to develop impressive exhibitions to promote positive public opinion and advance U.S. economic interests in Latin America. He believed the visual arts had the power to build bridges of understanding between foreign countries. The sharing of arts could provide a more favorable impression of Americans and American life. He wanted to transform the impression - held by many Latin Americans --that the U.S. was an imperializing and cultureless "colossus of the North."<sup>16</sup>

The notion of "national modernism" or the belief that modern art exchanges built a common spirit or alliance between nations had been tried as early as 1910.<sup>17</sup> Christian Brinton, a Progressive Period curator, had been interested in using modern European art exhibitions during the 1920's and 30's to establish relations with Scandinavian or east European countries

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<sup>15</sup> Cary Reich, *The Life of Nelson a. Rockefeller: Worlds to Conquer* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 251.

<sup>16</sup> Holly Barnet-Sanchez, "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art: U.S. Museums and the Role of Foreign Policy in the Appropriation and Transformation of Mexican Heritage 1933-1944" PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1993, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Walker, 1999, 59.

and help assimilate immigrant groups in the U.S.<sup>18</sup> What was new about Rockefeller's concept of "national modernism" was that he wanted to extend it past making alliances with the arts of white races of Europe, and join the arts of the United States with those of Hispanic countries. Rockefeller, who for years had traveled extensively throughout South American family oil interests, had fallen in love with the arts, people, and cultures of Latin America.<sup>19</sup>

Rockefeller was a gifted orator and the many public addresses he gave to special interest groups in the U.S. between the years of 1940 and 1944 are an excellent source from which to extract his philosophy.<sup>20</sup> He believed in the visual arts as visceral tools of communication that could convey cultural ideas and values intuitively, enjoin nations, and override the barriers of language. In his view art exchanges could bring sympathetic understanding and mutual respect between adversaries and art exhibitions could change erroneous or harmful cultural stereotypes, on both sides, an historic problem in U.S./Latin American relations. He also believed that while the Old World was currently at war, the New World must rise up and guard the democratic way of life. He argued that the more exchanges of art, music, and film, the greater mutual understanding among peoples. Rockefeller believed strongly in the power of public relations and said that cultural understanding was not only built by painters, sculptors, and musicians who create the works of art, but also came from those who were on the receiving end: the listening and reading public. He was sure that innate understanding of another nation's point of view could accrue through observing exhibitions of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 78 "Modern German Art Exhibition" (1909) MET; "Contemporary Scandinavian Art Exhibition" (1912-13) American Art Galleries, NY; "Contemporary Swedish Art Exhibition" (1916) Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and Brooklyn Art Museum.

<sup>19</sup> Reich, 1996, 83.

<sup>20</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, *Addresses of Nelson Rockefeller 1940-1944*, CIAA, Volume 1, bound.

their arts. Experiencing the undercurrent of spirituality and truth that the best of national arts communicated would create acceptance between nations.<sup>21</sup>

Rockefeller had other characteristics that strengthened his personal influence in addition to oratory. He was a gifted organizer, enthusiastic problem-solver, and compulsive multi-tasker, who needed little sleep to function.<sup>22</sup> He had charisma, leadership abilities, and confidence, and he was ambitious, efficient, and idealistic. Rockefeller tackled large-scale conceptual issues with the help of paid teams of advisors and employees in the field. He had powerful connections and possessed tenacity for tackling difficult problems. Even a personal problem with dyslexia probably added to his acute visual awareness; his interest in visual imagery continued throughout his life.<sup>23</sup>

Rockefeller liked to create or manipulate organizational structures. He developed a comprehensive “Cultural Relations Division” for the OCIAA in which art, music, publications, and motion pictures all had separate committees. These committees were the working arms of the OCIAA, each with communication outlets that Rockefeller actively shaped.<sup>24</sup> In his view, the structures of major art museums such as MoMA and NGA could function as ready-made cultural conduits for his committees.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Reich, 1996, xix.

<sup>23</sup> His two major biographers, Reich and Norton Smith, note these qualities repeatedly.

<sup>24</sup> Reich, 1996, 250.



## Rockefeller's Maneuvers

At first Rockefeller tried to continue both his presidency of the MoMA Board and his new government post, but after five months of juggling them he recognized he needed to concentrate his efforts solely on the OCIAA. He did not sever all ties with the MoMA, and, in fact, kept in close touch with members of the Board and staff. He was able to draw on MoMA resources for many OCIAA projects.

Rockefeller planned to fully utilize his connections with MoMA Board members, other art museums, and U.S. government officials. In 1938, at his own expense, he created "The Junta," a colloquium of high-level American advisors charged with giving him recommendations on complicated world issues.<sup>25</sup> Certain employees of MoMA, The Junta, and the OCIAA were inter-changeable since they held multiple positions. Some had duplicate responsibilities in two or more organizations or served as back-ups in double capacities. This kind of organization made communication more efficient, keeping the number of people to report to him at a minimum. For example, John Hay Whitney, who replaced Rockefeller as MoMA's President in 1941, had close ties with the Hollywood film industry and had also founded the MoMA Film Library in 1935. While he was head of MoMA, he agreed to lead OCIAA's Motion Picture Division and was instrumental in utilizing MoMA's film library to supply government agencies with films for strategic purposes.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Junta* means "administrative council" in Spanish.

<sup>26</sup> The OCIAA contracted with the MoMA Film Library to pay \$10,000 a month in services for screening, monitoring, processing, sound tracking, editing, and translating films. Reich, 1996, 219. According to Lynes, 1973, 237, contracts between MoMA and different government agencies added up to \$1,590,234 before the war was over.

Interfacing with the State Department, which was beginning to take on more and more cultural responsibilities, was another challenge for Rockefeller. There had been pressures on the State Department to act in greater cultural capacities after 1938, but the few cultural programs it had managed to develop were very narrowly defined.<sup>27</sup> To compound the problem, its Cultural Relations Division became spread thin when it was told to cover not only Latin American cultural relations but also those of China and other parts of the world.<sup>28</sup> There was the additional problem that the departments of State, Treasury, Agriculture, and Commerce were all working on separate, often unrelated, hemispheric exchange programs involving culture without coordinating their efforts.<sup>29</sup>

One of Nelson Rockefeller's tasks as OCIAA Coordinator was to establish liaisons between these varied departments and synchronize their actions to build stronger commercial and cultural ties between the U.S. and Latin America.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, the OCIAA locked horns with the State Department when Rockefeller's ambitious Latin American programs crossed the time-honored principle that held that only the State Department could work with foreign embassies or operate within their jurisdiction.<sup>31</sup>

Rockefeller initiated a program of OCIAA "coordinating committees" composed of U.S. expatriate businessmen living in Latin America, but he soon began having difficulties with

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<sup>27</sup> Claude C. Erb, "Nelson Rockefeller and United States-Latin American Relations 1940-1945." PhD diss. Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1982, 20

<sup>28</sup> Dupar, 2008, 112.

<sup>29</sup> Reich, 1996, 231-3.

<sup>30</sup> These ideas were not new to either Roosevelt or Rockefeller; they rested on a philosophy shared by U.S. leaders that "other nations could and should replicate America's own developmental experience and spread the American Dream in Europe, Asia and Latin America. See Emily Rosenberg. *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982),

<sup>31</sup> Reich, 1996, 204.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull.<sup>32</sup> President Roosevelt had to intervene and clarify that Rockefeller must first discuss all of his agency's programs fully with the Department of State and obtain their formal approval for new procedures.<sup>33</sup> Rockefeller agreed to share all future OCIAA cultural projects in their earliest stages. This incident is significant because it demonstrates government competition over areas of cultural power and the arts and establishes that the OCIAA, a temporary wartime agency that was more active and energetic, had less power than the permanent State Department.

Since the 1920's, the State Department had the authority to assign diplomats and trade commissioners abroad as civil servants responsible to the U.S. government. Rockefeller believed it was more effective to create a special corps of "coordinating committees" in each Latin American country that consisted of elite American expatriate businessmen functioning as the eyes and ears of the OCIAA.<sup>34</sup> These coordinating committees were to begin as "confidential so they wouldn't look like a fifth column."<sup>35</sup> Committee members were to act as on the ground operatives, closely observing opinions, tastes, and customs of Latin Americans and the press.<sup>36</sup> The committees maintained their own news clippings services, placed information in local newspapers and radio, and conducted surveys on local opinion. It was their

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<sup>32</sup> Reich, 2006, 203-209.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Cultural Relations attaches were officially added by the State Department in mid-1943 (Ninkovich, 1981, 41). Reich says that the OCIAA coordination committees were in place by 1942 in 67 cities. A State Department memo of April 1942 tried to limit their activities to non-political subjects. (Reich, 1996, 250)

<sup>35</sup> The idea for coordinating committees came from Edward Robbins, one of Rockefeller's operatives in Venezuela, Reich, 1996, 208.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

responsibility to continuously report back to the OCIAA and assist with implementation of the organization's projects.

In Rockefeller's view, the coordinating committees needed to function apart from U.S. embassies that were part of the State Department. He felt the embassies were poorly staffed and much less politically active, unable to help initiate propaganda battles against Axis representatives. Rockefeller finally obtained the State Department's consent and found a way for his people to coexist alongside those of the State Department. By 1943, the OCIAA employed 1,413 people and had coordinating committees in sixty-seven Latin American cities.<sup>37</sup>

In 1941 Nelson Rockefeller created a pictorial magazine modeled very closely on the pictorial format of *Life* called *En Guardia*.<sup>38</sup> It was a lavish monthly publication-- large-scale, in color, printed on quality paper, in Spanish and Portuguese -- that was published by "the Bureau of Coordination of Inter-American Affairs, Commerce Building, Washington DC." Sent free to embassies and coordinating committee offices for local distribution, the magazine's purpose was to promote friendly relations, express the immediacy of the war, and build mutual trust. About half the articles were about the United States and the remainder was focused on Latin America; all demonstrated the rewards of a democratic way of life. The articles flattered South American heroes like Domingo Sarmiento, Simon Bolivar, Benito Juarez, and José Martí and also gave viewer-friendly views of U.S. officials such as Cordell Hull or other high-level politicians in Washington. Many of the articles focused on technology in action and how South American countries actively contributed to the war. Images were lush and emotive, with popular appeal,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>38</sup> On Guard (to danger)

and attractively packaged for an educated Latin American middle-class. This type of format directly served OCIAA's public relations purposes. It could easily change the focus of its articles to cover current local interests as public interests quixotically changed. The OCIAA was very careful to monitor local public opinion on how the magazine was received and change its appeals accordingly.

The *En Guardia* magazine and the OCIAA coordination committees were quite successful in keeping a pulse on and formulating public opinion in key South American cities. Creating art or cultural exhibitions that shaped public opinion were more complex endeavors but Nelson Rockefeller was eager to explore them and utilize his ample art museum contacts in the initial stages of the agency.

### **Two Unrealized Exhibitions: "Our Common Culture" and "For Us the Living"**

The development of two major exhibitions that MoMA never fully realized are useful to study in order to understand what they can tell us about the limitations of art museums, propaganda, and the exhibition medium. Nelson Rockefeller initiated both projects and both occurred in the second half of 1940 just after Roosevelt had appointed him as Coordinator of the OCIAA.

The year 1940 had been an expansive one for MoMA, beginning with presentations of the exhibitions "Italian Masters" and "Mexico Thirty Centuries."<sup>39</sup> The second half of the year, as MoMA's new President of the Board, Rockefeller initiated two more ambitious exhibitions,

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<sup>39</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, he had great political success with "Italian Masters" and "Mexico Twenty Centuries" in the first half of 1940.

as strategies to build hemispheric unity and reinforce the importance of democratic institutions: "Our Common Culture" and "For Us the Living."

Rockefeller garnered MoMA trustee support for these projects from the strength of his new government appointment since many trustees were genuinely concerned that various western European nations had fallen victim to Hitler's attacks. Rockefeller felt that the vulnerability of South America was a major concern for security of the Western Hemisphere. Argentina was already a problem with pro-Hitler nationalist army factions; Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil were vulnerable according to OCIAA informants. He feared that these countries would form alliances with Axis powers and convinced the President of the urgency.

Rockefeller believed harmful cultural misconceptions embedded in Axis propaganda disseminated by newspapers and film were damaging to hemispheric security and unity. He believed that the problem of harmful stereotypes on both sides had reached emergency proportions.<sup>40</sup> "Our Common Culture" could potentially eliminate national stereotypes, create positive public opinion between U.S. and Latin America nations, and build stronger hemispheric unity.

The idea for "Our Common Culture" seems to have surfaced during a two-day conference on "Inter-American Relations in the Field of Art" organized by the Department of State at the end of 1939.<sup>41</sup> It was to be a comprehensive traveling exhibition that would cover

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<sup>40</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting of Policy Committee of Cultural Relations, Division of Coordinator's Office" by George S. Franklin, September 27, 1940. Office of the Coordinator: Minutes of Meetings 1940, 5. 1941; Box 543; Entry 1710; Record Group 229. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

<sup>41</sup> Washington D.C, October 11 and 12, 1939. See Holly Barnet-Sanchez. "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art: U.S. Museums and the Role of Foreign Policy in the Appropriation and Transformation of Mexican Heritage 1933-1944" PhD diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1993, 148.

the entire spectrum of Western Hemisphere interrelations and demonstrate that there were strong underlying artistic traditions that historically bound it together. As the conference ended, members of the group elected a “continuation committee” to follow up on suggestions. Nelson Rockefeller took this committee and transformed it into an OCIAA Advisory Committee on Art.<sup>42</sup>

Given Alfred Barr’s talents for synthesizing and bringing apparently unrelated arts traditions into harmony, Rockefeller asked him to create a scholarly rationale for “Our Common Culture.”<sup>43</sup> The plan entailed reconstructing an all-inclusive indigenous Pan-American heritage stressing a unified pre-history for North and South America. If anyone could do this, surely Alfred Barr fit the bill; in fact, in 1933 MoMA had previously featured an exhibition of pre-Columbian art entitled “American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Incan)” drawn entirely from pre-Columbian artworks in the U.S. and interpreted by American scholars. John Abbott, who was both Vice President of MoMA and Chairman of the OCIAA Advisory Committee on Art, wrote a supporting letter for “Our Common Culture” to the OCIAA Policy Committee.<sup>44</sup>

Recognizing that each South American country had different needs and interests, Rockefeller wanted the project to consist of a number of separate but inter-related exhibitions that circulated throughout the United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Each exhibition was aimed at educating a particular audience and correcting cultural

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<sup>42</sup> “Minutes of the Meeting of Policy Committee of Cultural Relations, Division of Coordinator’s Office” by George S. Franklin, September 27, 1940. Office of the Coordinator: Minutes of Meetings 1940-1941; Box 543; Entry 1710; Record Group 229. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

<sup>43</sup> “Our Common Culture or The Art of the Western Hemisphere, or The Art of Our Hemisphere, or The Culture of Our Hemisphere,” Alfred Barr, October 25, 1940, Appendix D. Barnet Sanchez, 1993, 272-279. George C. Valliant, a prominent anthropologist living in NY, was also asked to provide content about pre-Columbian cultures.

<sup>44</sup>NA OIAA GR/1:0 from Barnet-Sanchez, 1990, 158.

misconceptions that had been identified for the people of a particular nation. The concept of the project was to emphasize the under-riding unity of arts and cultures in the Western Hemisphere while maintaining the distinctive developments in each place. The goal was to demonstrate that its nations had cross-fertilized one another's arts and culture over time during Pre-Columbian, Colonial, and Modern epochs.<sup>45</sup>

Specific American art museums were asked to organize and execute different exhibitions. However, the project was delayed several times and soon it was ultimately cancelled. Evidently there were problems with energy, funding, personnel, coordination, or time constraints from various museums that were asked to participate. Such exhibitions needed significant lead-time, institutional labor, and planning. While "Our Common Culture" might be exciting in theory, it was too impractical and complicated to carry out for immediate results.

Rockefeller's next unrealized exhibition concept, "For Us the Living," was a complex endeavor meant to alert Americans to the dangers of Axis propaganda and galvanize the American public into action. It was initially kept secret and entitled "Exhibition X." Together Nelson and his mother, Abby, telephoned Lesley Cheek, Director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, and asked him to come to New York to discuss a major exhibition priority for MoMA.<sup>46</sup> They wanted Cheek to curate a mega-exhibition for New York devoted to convincing the American public about the true dangers of Hitler's assault on the Free World and the necessity for the U.S. to prepare itself for inevitable war.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Barr proposal and its Planning Outline" in Appendix D of Barnett-Sanchez diss. 1993, 272-79. "A.H. Barr, October 25, 1940."

<sup>46</sup> Lesley Cheek Jr. Papers, Folder 1, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Nelson A. Rockefeller to Henry E. Treide, President, Baltimore Museum of Art, July 9, 1940. Lesley Cheek Jr. Papers, Folder 1, Museum of Modern Art Archives.



Cheek was enthusiastic about the project and suggested that Lewis Mumford, noted sociologist and public philosopher on the development of cities, join them. Cheek developed a team of advisors composed of Lewis Mumford, Archibald MacLeish (Librarian of Congress), Beardsley Ruml (of Rockefeller Philanthropic Enterprises, MoMA Board), and Philip Goodwin (MoMA architect and Trustee). In order for Cheek to curate the exhibition, it would be necessary for him to be released from his duties at Baltimore and remain in New York full-time. He made plans to cover his Baltimore post and enthusiastically began work with his New York team.<sup>48</sup>

The concept of “Exhibition X” was expounded in a fifty-page paper.<sup>49</sup> The document was a kind of “credo” or declaration of faith in U.S. democratic institutions that could be repeated in multiple formats such as movies, radio programs, or magazines in order to achieve maximum publicity. Cheek was sure that MoMA benefactors, who had put up millions for advertising at the 1939 World’s Fair, would be able to find funds for a project of this enormity.<sup>50</sup>

Exhibition X, which became re-titled “For Us the Living,” was meant to emphasize the magnitude of the Nazi threat to democracy and demonstrate what would happen if Hitler took over the U.S. Obviously America must be forewarned and prepared.<sup>51</sup> The exhibition format

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, Nelson A. Rockefeller Personal Projects, Record Group 4, Series L, Project S, Box 137, Folder 341. “Scenario (No. 5) For Proposed Exhibition Entitled “For Us The Living.” Typed September 10, 1940. Tentative and Confidential. No author. All descriptions of the exhibition described in the dissertation are taken from this 65-page script.

<sup>50</sup> Lesley Cheek Jr. Papers, Folder 1, Letter from Lesley Cheek to Nelson Rockefeller, September 1940, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>51</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, Nelson A. Rockefeller Personal Projects, Record Group 4, Series L, Project S, Box 137, Folder 341. “Scenario (No. 5) For Proposed Exhibition Entitled “For Us The Living.” (not paginated)

was believed to be the perfect device for attracting, teaching, and alerting the American middle-class of imminent danger. It was described as “a new form of dramatic presentation in which “the spectator is both a witness and an actor in the scenes that unfold...By throwing all the necessary financial and moral weight behind this show we prove that America can act and that bold and important measures can be taken for the defense of democracy.”<sup>52</sup>

The exhibition was conceived as a multi-media “Pilgrim’s Progress” for the American citizen and designed to fit inside a twelve-step gallery format.<sup>53</sup> Each gallery was to be experienced by visitors in linear fashion, requiring them to emotionally reflect upon facets of idealized American history. At the end of the exhibit spectators were given a crucial choice on whether or not to save America. In the final scene called “The Hall of Eternal Values,” citizens were urged to reflect upon democracy and “eternal truths about human conduct on which all high religions agree.”<sup>54</sup>

The impact of “For Us the Living” was to come from three-dimensional figures, human voices, and music. There were no artworks per se; the exhibition was rationalized less as an art experience than as an inspiring exercise in public persuasion. All visuals were to be realistic images of people and environments. They were to be artistically arranged to bombard senses and emotions through constant motion (color, lights, sound, and still and moving images) and physical enactment (ascending to different rooms, confronting peak historic figures like Hitler, encountering juxtaposed panels, or negotiating contrasting halls, balconies, stairways, multiple levels.) The exhibition was supposed to demonstrate “what voluntary cooperation and free

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, Introduction to the manuscript.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

enterprise without totalitarian government support could do for our country.” Its authors intended it to be “proof that America can act and that bold and important measures could be taken for the defense of democracy.”<sup>55</sup>

However, after two months of intense development, the MoMA trustees abruptly cancelled “For Us the Living”<sup>56</sup> Perhaps they felt the messages to be projected were too grandiose or extended far beyond the abilities of an art museum setting to produce them. Their decision was a huge disappointment to the members of the prestigious exhibition team. Mumford and Cheek had exhaustively worked up five different scenarios to present to the Board. As a “propagandist for the government” MacLeish had put his heart and soul into the project.<sup>57</sup> The trustees felt that while the exhibition message was important, it wouldn’t really be effective in an art museum context. They suggested other formats would be better, such as a film or book.<sup>58</sup>

Though never realized, both exhibitions were important in refining Rockefeller’s ideas about museums and exhibition rhetoric. They also taught him the practical limits of American museums. There was also a thin line between dispensing interpretive cultural information about the arts and distributing propaganda.<sup>59</sup> At that point, the word propaganda did not have the negative connotations it now holds.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Lesley Cheek Jr. Papers, Folder 1. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Scott Donaldson and R.H. Winnick, *Archibald MacLeish: An American Life*.

(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 348. The career of Archibald MacLeish was a mix of World War II government information and cultural concerns. In addition to being Librarian of Congress, he was also Director of the War Department’s Office of Facts and Figures and Assistant Director of the Office of War Information Department.

<sup>58</sup> Lesley Cheek Jr. Papers, Folder 1, September 7, 2016. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Winkler.1978.

That two mega-patriotic exhibitions could be cancelled after an extensive concept development phase must have been due to a realistic appraisal of the power of exhibitions against more sober recognition of the realities of exhibition cost, production, and labor. Since the OCIAA was increasingly beholden to MoMA for film work during the war, it was likely difficult to ask MoMA to also take on major organization efforts for high-intensity, major exhibitions. Rockefeller may have decided that perhaps it would be easier to persuade other U.S. art museums to use their existing structures and contacts for exhibition production and help develop more modest exchange exhibitions for the war effort rather than relying so much on any one institution.

### **“A Special Exhibition of Contemporary U.S. Painting”**

OCIAA’s first exhibition, “A Special Exhibition of Contemporary Painting in the United States,” was elaborate in size, scope, and method of production, and reflected Nelson Rockefeller’s expansive powers to bring people and organizations together.<sup>60</sup> To create it, the OCIAA contracted with five New York art museums and gave each one responsibility for part of the project.

Such a consortium of museums was unusual but necessary, given the fact that no one museum was willing or able to take on the work of coordination.<sup>61</sup> Porter McCray was the

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<sup>60</sup> “Exposición de Pintura Contemporánea Norteamericana” circulated to 10 capitals of American republics between 1941-42.

<sup>61</sup> “Interview with Porter McCray” by Sharon Zane. Museum of Modern Art Oral History Project. [www.dissertation.lib-ebook.com/d-economy/2325822-1-interview-with-porter-mccray-pm-interviewer-sharon-zane-sz.php](http://www.dissertation.lib-ebook.com/d-economy/2325822-1-interview-with-porter-mccray-pm-interviewer-sharon-zane-sz.php) (accessed May 2016). Nelson Rockefeller met Porter McCray through Wallace Harrison, primary architect for The Rockefeller Center; Porter McCray had been a student of Theodore Sizer’s at Yale. He would continue to work with Rockefeller who would hire him in 1947 as Director of Circulating Exhibitions at MoMA.

OCIAA exhibition specialist, charged with contracting and coordinating the museums “to jointly curate an exhibition for Latin American audiences ... of works by US artists from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.”<sup>62</sup> The collaborating museums were the MoMA, the Met, the Whitney Museum of Art, Brooklyn Art Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History. Nelson Rockefeller had ties to important individuals in all of them.

The organization of the exhibition was complicated.<sup>63</sup> There was a managing team of museum directors, as well as a separate “Committee on Art” whose members collaborated with other necessary curatorial and support staff to choose the objects and handle the organization of the exhibition. There was a separate “Committee on Selection and Hanging” that consisted of five museum curators. John Abbott, who was Vice-President of MoMA and also chaired the OCIAA’s “Art Committee of the Cultural Relations Division,” agreed to be the key administrator for the exhibition. Grace McCann Morley, Director of the San Francisco Museum of Art and an expert in Latin America, served as “Special Consultant to the Committee on Art” and the “Latin American Representative.” Helen Appleton Read, a prominent New York art critic and scholar served as “Director of the Exhibitions sent to Latin America and Director of the Catalogue.”<sup>64</sup>

The exhibition consisted of five hundred and thirty two works of contemporary American art in oils and watercolors. The titles were all descriptive, the artworks were done in realistic styles, showing people and places that gave a wholesome, idealized, glimpse of

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<sup>62</sup> Catha Paquette, “Soft Power: The Art of Diplomacy in US-Mexican Relations 1940-1946.” In *!Américas Unidas! : Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs 1940-1946*. Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch, eds. (Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012), 143-181.

<sup>63</sup>The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Contemporary Painting in the United States: A Special Exhibition April 19 through April 27* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1941).

<sup>64</sup> Thirty thousand copies of the catalogue were produced in Spanish and Portuguese for the eight Latin American republics that hosted the exhibition. Coordinators Art Program, Committee on Art, Porter McCray Report, p. 5. Early Museum History File 11.13, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

American life that might appeal to Latin Americans. There were inviting images of landscapes, agricultural scenes, beaches, people at work, farmhands, fishermen at sea, or people at leisure in parks, churches or circuses. Object choices were painstaking in the sense that they followed the Americana logic of local FAP subject matter and the breadth of its regional distribution in an attempt to provide what was considered a fair representation of America. There were fifty-six sources for loans, the majority of which were private collectors, which made the administrative and insurance arrangements challenging. It was evidently not possible for the consortium to simplify the project by borrowing from a lesser number of loan sources, a strategy that would have made the project infinitely simpler, cheaper, and less labor-intensive.

The assembled works received a gala social “preview” at The Metropolitan Museum of Art where collectors could see and discuss the chosen works.<sup>65</sup> Once the exhibition closed, the works were “divided into three smaller units to be displayed in major art centers of other American republics.”<sup>66</sup> OCIAA’s intention was to sweep major cities of Latin America in the most efficient manner possible. The East Coast Section went to Havana, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires. The West Coast Section was sent to Santiago, Lima, and Mexico City. The North Central Section went to Caracas, Bogota, and Quito. Each of the three units contained approximately eighty artworks and traveled to four venues.<sup>67</sup>

These exhibitions were meant to target elite audiences in major Latin American cities whose opinions would trickle down to the masses and help shape favorable public opinions of

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<sup>65</sup> April 9-27, 1941

<sup>66</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Contemporary Painting in the United States: A Special Exhibition April 19 through April 27*. (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1941.) In Latin America, the project was called “Exposición de pintura contemporánea norte Americana”

<sup>67</sup> Any lender had to agree to the cumulative handling and wear-and-tear on their artworks. On the other hand, the fact that their art was exhibited in multiple museums would add to the provenance and value of the work.

America.<sup>68</sup> Rockefeller's definition of elite audiences extended from government leaders and politicians to community leaders and people of means and influence-- anyone who would be impressed by a museum presentation of art. According to his logic, if he could influence the elite people on top, the masses below would surely follow. The ultimate goal was for cities to plan exchange exhibitions for sister republics, utilizing a network of universal museum connections. Hopefully, negative views of *norteamericanos* and attitudes about U.S. imperialism could be gradually dissolved in the minds of elite individuals through insights of national character gleaned from the artworks.

Rockefeller's hopes were not rewarded in every country. According to the OCIAA press release, "in scope and quality the exhibit [was] unequalled in American art history."<sup>69</sup> But Mexican audiences were not impressed and found the exhibition to be "of indifferent quality."<sup>70</sup> Grace Morley, who wrote, after an extensive trip to South America: "Paris [has been] the artistic and cultural mecca for intellectuals and artists in South America. We have to be aware of this in terms of how American pictures would be received. There will be a critical and skeptical attitude by many – we will have to compete with established European styles. It may be hard for them to understand our country and our people if we send things that are highly original."<sup>71</sup> Negative response was also documented by Alfred Barr after a trip he made to

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<sup>68</sup> Pacquette, 2012,148.

<sup>69</sup> Undated, untitled press release, circa April 20, 1941: MoMA Archives New York: EMH 11.211b.

<sup>70</sup> Stanton Catlin. "Report on the Exposición de Pintura Contemporánea Norteamericana," 1941. (NARA, RG220. Records of the Department of Information, Education Division, Reports and other Records (E-91: Box 1218; Folder "Art-Report of the Exposición de Pintura Norte Americana.

<sup>71</sup> Morley, Grace. "Preliminary Report Exhibitions of United States Art in South America and Cuba, April 1941. 52 pages. Early Museum History File 11.25 "Minutes of the Meeting of the Advisory Art Committee of the Office of the Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics." March 19, 1941. The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

South America the following year: “We found little spontaneous enthusiasm for the United States and a generally critical attitude toward American painting – verging on contempt.”<sup>72</sup>

Although the overt goals of the exhibition to favorably impress elite Latin American audiences with contemporary American artistry were not realized, Rockefeller probably learned important lessons about the value of museum consortiums working together to share weighty responsibilities of exhibition implementation. For their part, the collaborating museums learned lessons about how to work together, increase their resources, and lighten their workloads. Rockefeller persevered in pushing exhibition diplomacy in different directions by trying other projects.

### **“South American Presidential Busts” and “Chilean Contemporary Art”**

Rockefeller did not allow negative reports of “A Special Exhibition of Contemporary Painting” to dissuade him; he tried another organizational tactic he felt sure would appeal to South American leaders. President Roosevelt had enthusiastically authorized a project of South American Presidential Busts.<sup>73</sup> The previous year the OCIAA had commissioned an eminent U.S. male sculptor, Jo Davidson, to travel to South America to produce bronze busts of the presidents of ten republics.<sup>74</sup> The outcome was to be an exhibition of contemporary busts of South American presidents that opened at the NGA in the summer of 1942. After the exhibition

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<sup>72</sup> Barr, Jr., Alfred H., “Mexican Report, 1942: Alfred H. Barr Jr. Papers, AAA: 3264:366 in Pacquette, 2012, 153, and footnote 41, 177.

<sup>73</sup> The idea for the project possibly originated with the President. The artist, Jo Davidson, was active politically and had supported the first administration of his presidency. Davidson had also sculpted heads of heroes of World War I in France, at the insistence of the Creel Committee on Public Information.

<sup>74</sup> This required first casting the busts in clay and later casting them in bronze upon returning to the U.S.



was presented in Washington, the Department of State and the U.S. government formally presented the busts to the governments of the ten South American republics.<sup>75</sup>

Jo Davidson was an established contemporary American artist who recognized the exhibition was meant to flatter South American dignitaries. He produced the busts in an honorific, somewhat classical style, first making clay models in transit and then completing the final works in bronze upon return to the U.S. The country of Venezuela was actually represented by two busts because Davidson's visit to Caracas coincided with a post-election change in the presidency. Busts of President Roosevelt and Vice President Henry Wallace were also included in the display. It was incumbent upon the NGA to accept the exhibition but they did not locate it in one of the main NGA art galleries. Instead, it was placed in the West Garden Court, an open area with columns and plants and a place customarily used for public concerts.<sup>76</sup> It is significant that the exhibition was not accorded an art gallery location by NGA, in respect to the late Andrew Mellon's wishes.

This project required close collaboration between NGA and the OCIAA. "Bronze Busts" was a project of the Science and Education Division of the OCIAA Art Section. It met the authorization procedures required by the State Department.<sup>77</sup> Porter McCray, OCIAA's exhibition specialist who had gained experience with "A Special Exhibition of Contemporary

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<sup>75</sup> Chile's President, Pedro Aguirre Cerde, died in November 1941 and was replaced by a new president on February 1, 1942. The bust of Cerde was represented in the exhibition and catalogue and would have been presented to Chile by the State Department. No mention had been made of the newly elected President Juan Antonio Rios in the catalogue, a situation that can't have pleased President Rios.

<sup>76</sup> There were eleven busts of South American Presidents and the two U.S. presidents, denoting solidarity. The exhibition was scheduled six months after the U.S. entered World War II from June 27-July 19, 1942.

<sup>77</sup> Records of the Office of the Inter-American Affairs, Record Group 229. "Proposed Project Authorization: Exhibition of the Bronze Busts of Ten South American Presidents by Jo Davidson. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

Painting in the United States,” was in charge of coordinating the making of the busts, organizing the exhibition, producing the catalogue, coordinating publicity in the United States and Latin America, and arranging an elegant diplomatic opening event in honor of elite South American representatives.<sup>78</sup>

Collaboration between the OCIAA project and the NGA did not initially go smoothly. There is reason to believe the National Gallery of Art felt uncomfortable with hosting this exhibition in the main galleries of the museum, perhaps owing to the fact that Davidson was a living artist.<sup>79</sup> The NGA Trustees needed several meetings before they approved the exhibition. There were misunderstandings regarding the press release, which David Finley insisted must come from the OCIAA rather than the museum.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately the release was issued by the OCIAA with apologies to NGA from McCray; the final release did not carry the National Gallery of Art letterhead. Nevertheless, David Finley wrote a cordial letter to McCray at the end of the exhibition stating “I think without question the public has enjoyed the exhibition and I was sorry to see it, with all its flags, leave us yesterday.”

McCray soon obtained a continuing office space inside of NGA in order to manage other OCIAA projects. In this capacity he also worked with numerous art museums besides NGA, such as Brooklyn, the Met, MoMA, Walker Art Gallery, and *Time-Life* to facilitate OCIAA exhibitions. In 1944 the OCIAA office was still located inside NEA but its name was changed to “Inter-

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<sup>78</sup> National Gallery of Art, *Bronzes by Jo Davidson: Presidents of the South American Republics*. (Washington, D.C.1942) 24 pages, in Spanish, English, and Portuguese.

<sup>79</sup> Memorandum to Francis Jamieson, Director of OCIAA Press Division, from Porter McCray. “Exhibition Problems” 1210-1212 Record Group 229. Declassification Review Projects 795087. National Archives at College Park Md.

<sup>80</sup>“Bronzes by Jo Davidson,” June 22, 1942. <https://www.nga.gov/research/gallery-archives/press-release> (accessed October, 2016)

American Office” and it was supported by a grant from the Department of State. The grant covered the duties of carrying on the OCIAA art exchange program and “administering, maintaining, and expanding a program of artistic exchange with other American Republics.”<sup>81</sup>

“Chilean Contemporary Art” (1943) was the next exhibition that Rockefeller and the OCIAA created for political purposes. There were strategic reasons for the U.S. government to pursue good relations with Chile. Though Chile had remained neutral during World War II, it was not necessarily a friend of the United States. It contained an influential German minority that was showing both pro-and anti-Allied sentiments.<sup>82</sup> Chile also had large sources of copper, a commodity the U.S. badly needed during wartime.

Rockefeller had been interested in Chile ever since his first trip there in 1937; he subsequently returned there several times in order to develop stronger contacts. Rockefeller saw Chile as an important OCIAA project and a country that showed great potential for moving onto the Allies side. He felt “an exhibition of paintings such as the one chosen jointly by the authorities in Chile and a director of a United States museum...is the best possible means of furthering and fostering mutual interests of Chile and the United States in the field of Art.”<sup>83</sup> For its part, the government of Chile was interested in featuring its contemporary art as a sign of advanced cultural development. Santiago had previously been a recipient of the West Coast Section of “Contemporary Painting in the United States,” so a cultural connection already

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<sup>81</sup> Margaret D. Garrett, “Report of the Inter-American Office National Gallery of Art, January 1944-May 1946.” <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000249749>. (accessed July 2017). In 1947, Rockefeller asked McCray to serve as the director for both the national and international circulating exhibition programs at MoMA. McCray accepted the post and remained at MOMA until 1961.

<sup>82</sup> Michael J. Francis, *The Limits of Hegemony: United States Relations with Argentina and Chile During World War II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.)

<sup>83</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center. “Exhibition Problems 1210-1212, Record Group 229; 795087.

existed. It was fortuitous that the four hundredth anniversary of Chile's capital, Santiago, was imminent; the exhibition was organized to coincide with this event.<sup>84</sup>

Recognizing from past experience that he could not rely solely on MoMA to organize the Chilean exhibition, Rockefeller found an enterprising American museum in the Midwest to take on the legwork: the Toledo Museum of Art.<sup>85</sup> The collaborative development of the exhibition between this institution and Chile seems to have evolved from cordial social relationships and a desire for increased status and prestige on the part of the Director of the Toledo Museum.<sup>86</sup> The Toledo Museum of Art took on the bulk of responsibilities for the project and the OCIAA offered support "as needed" but was limited in its responsibilities.<sup>87</sup>

Nelson Rockefeller first went before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives to ask for funding for the exhibition but had no success.<sup>88</sup> He argued that OCIAA projects had to be kept dynamic and flexible to meet changing needs of specific countries. He claimed it was therefore not possible to specify in precise terms exactly how the projects will materialize. These arguments were not compelling to the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Founded in 1901, the Toledo Museum followed in the educational tradition of Dana and was connected with the Libbey Glass Company, a local business that made industrial glass.

<sup>86</sup> The OCIAA handled all the South American publicity, assisted with trans-shipment of artworks from Santiago to New York, gave receptions for Chilean visitors to Toledo, arranged a opening radio broadcast, and assisted with helping Toledo find participating museums in the US. The Toledo Art Museum was in charge of paying for the bulk of the project, handling catalogue production and publicity in the United States, organizing and financing the opening ceremony, arranging the exhibition venues, reimbursing Chileans for expenses, and scheduling the exhibition venues in the U.S.

<sup>87</sup> All information in this section is drawn from three boxes of "OCIAA Exhibition Problems" 795087,1210-1212, Record Group 229. The National Archives at College Park, College Park, Md.

<sup>88</sup> "Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Seventy-seventh Congress, first session." U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941. Erb, 1982, 717.

Appropriations Committee who wanted to know exactly what the exhibition would accomplish. It was necessary to look elsewhere for development funding.

Personal connections and ambitions of high-ranking individuals are often what solidify ties for exhibitions. Phillip Adams, who was Executive Secretary for the OCIAA Art Committee established the necessary connection to the Director of the Toledo Art Museum. Blake-More Godwin was Director of the Toledo Museum of Art between 1927-1959; his wife, Molly Ohl Godwin, was active in developing the collections and supervising an art school contained inside the museum. Both of them were excited about a potential project with Chile, although initially they thought it was going to be Chilean art from the Colonial period. Godwin was a friend of John Abbott's and he also knew Philip Adams who was executive secretary of the OCIAA Art Committee.

Godwin was invited to Abbott's New York home to discuss the project. He learned the OCIAA would pay for an initial trip to Santiago for him and his wife so that they could negotiate the parameters of an exhibition and its organization with Chilean officials. The Godwin's were told they would be representing "the museums of the United States." An employee of the OCIAA stated:

Museums in the United States are glad to participate in these reciprocal exhibitions on the grounds that they are contributing to the national program of defense activities by undertaking the task of putting all of their resources at their disposal. The museum assumes the responsibility and the initiative but the cooperative character of the undertaking is shown by printing a line on the title page of the catalogue stating "in collaboration with the OCIAA."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center. "Exhibition Problems 1210-1212, Record Group 229; 795087. Memorandum from Mary Winslow of the OCIAA to Blake-More Godwin.

It is not difficult to imagine the incentives for the Toledo Museum of Art to justify such a major project. The museum was trying to build a reputation for itself as a leading cultural center in the Midwest. It had recently held a successful Hispanic art exhibition and saw a project with Chile could further community art education. Molly Ohl Godwin probably saw the collaboration with the faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Chile as a big inducement and a chance to win national publicity for Toledo.<sup>90</sup>

The Godwin's trip to Santiago went well; they recognized immediately that an exhibition promoting contemporary art was of major interest to Chilean officials. They became part of a jury of Chilean artists and scholars that would select the works. Toledo officials were enthusiastic about arranging community programs and festivals in their city. Chilean representatives were told that the exhibition could circulate to many American cities and that other U.S museums will also want to do multiple festivals that connect Santiago and the U.S. There was every expectation from Chile that Nelson Rockefeller would continue to be prominent on the project.<sup>91</sup>

Rockefeller hoped to create a network of nation-to-nation and city-to-city alliances between Toledo and Santiago. The museum was responsible for getting the citizens of Toledo involved. Godwin wrote to employee Agnes Rindge of the OCIAA in New York, "We are trying to get this town so organized for the Chilean exhibition that every school child in town will visit the

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<sup>90</sup> "We are trying to get this town so organized for the Chilean exhibition that every school child in town will visit the show and every woman's club and every man's club and every individual that we can watch will get in." Letter from Blake-More Godwin to Agnes Rindge of the OCIAA. Rockefeller Archive Center. "Exhibition Problems 1210-1212, Record Group 229; 795087.

<sup>91</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center. "Exhibition Problems 1210-1212, Record Group 229; 795087.

show, and every woman's club and every man's club and every individual that we can catch will get in."<sup>92</sup>

The front matter of the exhibition catalogue emphasizes the hierarchy of important individuals from both countries and includes four pages of impressive listings. Honorary Patrons, Honorary Committees, and Planning Committees were established in both Santiago and Toledo; these pages emphasize a bilateral political structure and are an impressive array of governmental and cultural officials<sup>93</sup>

Archival records indicate Toledo had difficulties in getting U.S. government officials to participate even as figureheads.<sup>94</sup> The museum wanted the President of the United States to head the project but the OCIAA insisted that the Vice President of the United States should be asked instead. The Vice President declined to participate and Rockefeller asked Charles Thompson, who was Chief of Cultural Relations for the Department of State to be the highest government representative of the exhibition. The President later consented to be listed in the catalogue; Nelson Rockefeller and Charles Thompson followed his example. Then Godwin had to write at least nine different figureheads in the U.S. to ask them to be Honorary Patrons, in order to yield sufficient American members to balance out the Chilean side.

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<sup>92</sup> Letter from Blake-More Godwin to Agnes Rindge. Rockefeller Archive Center. "Exhibition Problems 1210-1212, Record Group 229; 795087.

<sup>93</sup> Molly Ohl Godwin, Eugenio Pereira Salas, and Carlos Humeres Solar. *Chilean Contemporary Art*. (Toledo: Toledo Museum of Art, 1941). Honorary Patrons of Chile began with the President of the Republic, three ministers (Foreign Affairs, Education, Interior), the Chilean Ambassador in Washington D.C., and distinguished faculty members of the University of Chile. Of equal length on the U.S side were the President of the United States, the Acting Secretary of State and upper level government staff, the Governor of Ohio, Nelson Rockefeller, and various high officials of the OCIAA.

<sup>94</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center. "Exhibition Problems 1210-1212, Record Group 229; 795087; letters to Thompson, Duggan, Bonsal, Rowe, de Alba, Jems, Hasler, and Palmer, all dated February 20-3, 1942).

Rockefeller did not himself want to be overtly associated with “Chilean Contemporary Art” because the U.S. Secretary of State did not want high-level government officials closely connected with the project. The State Department took this position fearing the U.S. press would write articles criticizing the government for manipulating art exhibitions for political purposes. This accusation had, in fact, been made several times with MoMA and neither government officials nor Alfred Barr appreciated these associations that undercut the authenticity and importance of the artworks, the museums, and the project’s integrity.

Toledo Art Museum subsequently experienced difficulties filling U.S. venues for the exhibition. Godwin discussed his problems in a letter to Francis Taylor of the Metropolitan: “Personally I would just as soon wind it up and get out from under the burden of pushing it around. On the other hand, as I see by the papers you are as firmly committed to cultural interchange between the Americas as I am, maybe we ought to keep it [the exhibition] moving...”<sup>95</sup>

Slowly, the exhibition circuit was finalized. The NGA agreed to take the second venue of the exhibition.<sup>96</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art scheduled it only after much arm-twisting.<sup>97</sup> According to Porter McCray, who assisted with exhibition traveling arrangements for OCIAA, most U.S. museums that took the exhibition only did so because they saw it “as something to help out with the war.”<sup>98</sup> The exhibition finally traveled to two less noted institutions, the

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<sup>95</sup> Loan Exhibitions Held 1942; 1942-44. Letter from Blake-More Godwin to Francis Taylor dated December 10, 1942. Archives of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>96</sup> October 10-November 8, 1942. No files could be found for the exhibition in the NGA archives although the exhibition does appear on their electronic listings and they issued a short press release.

<sup>97</sup> At first the Met declined the show. It later agreed to present it but put it in a lesser gallery.

<sup>98</sup> Zane interview with Porter McCray, Archives of American Art.



Columbus Art Museum and the Pasadena Art Institute. It was accepted the prestigious Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco where OCIAA advisor Grace McCann Morley was Director and could hardly refuse it. Apparently most American art museums were not greatly interested in Chilean contemporary art and saw no use for such an exhibition in their programs.<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, certain political benefits accrued from the project. The President of Chile visited the exhibition in Toledo as well as Washington D.C. Nelson Rockefeller and Sumner Welles, Acting Secretary of State, gave opening addresses that were broadcast nationally on NBC radio.<sup>100</sup> Both addresses were opportunities to drive home Nelson Rockefeller's philosophy and rhetoric. The Welles speech read: "we are now fighting against...enslavement of individual creative impulse. We are all, in our twenty-one republics, rooted in American soil where since the period of early colonization of our own art, our institutions have been developing in our own democratic lands...In these pictures and sculptures, Chile speaks a language that all Americans understand."<sup>101</sup> Evidently a new level of country-to-country understanding was being constructed.

Rockefeller's address extolled the humanity of Chilean artworks and drove home the themes of mutual unity, urgency, and physical intimacy:

A nation's art works are its family treasures...having these paintings and sculptures with us is a little like being invited into the homes of our friends and becoming acquainted with the possessions they cherish as expressing not simply the tastes and traditions of the family life but their very selves...If we are going to stand together and win together in this struggle, it is

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<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately the museum got stuck with a 26% freight bill surcharge (\$10,000.) to cover the risk of transporting the paintings initially. Then, at the end of the run there was difficulty returning the paintings to Chile when their shipment became vulnerable to submarine attack. Loan Exhibitions Held 1942-44: Chilean Exhibition. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

<sup>100</sup> Sumner Welles' speech was actually read by Charles Thompson.

<sup>101</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, "Exhibition Problems 1210-1212, Record Group 229; 795087. Script of Chilean Opening Program, message of Sumner Wells, Acting Secretary of State, read by Charles Thompson.

essential that men and women of both these continents understand each other's customs and history, each others aims and aspirations, each other's love of beauty, and each other's lives.<sup>102</sup>

Stating that contemporary Chilean artworks were like cherished family treasures that could only be observed inside the privacy of a friend's home suggested an unfounded personal intimacy with Chileans and took the parameters of the experience from collective to personal.

The OCIAA persisted in cultivating Chile using the media of motion pictures. In 1943, it produced a film called "Housing in Chile" that demonstrated the great civic progress the country was making while still maintaining significant cultural growth. Chile ultimately broke its relations with Axis countries in 1943. By 1945, it had declared war on Japan and become a member of the United Nations. With the help of these OCIAA projects the OCIAA had succeeded in in meeting its goal.

After 1942 the OCIAA was less than enthusiastic about encouraging art museums to organize elaborate international exhibitions. It proved to be much more efficient to use media that were less labor intensive or complicated than exhibitions and that could be produced more easily and quickly. However, the political rewards and prestige of such exhibitions had not gone unnoticed by certain American art museums and some of them began to develop exhibitions with Latin America on their own initiative, provided their directors and boards were sufficiently motivated. The OCIAA continued to take advantage of such situations but stepped back from playing a major role. During 1943-45 more major U.S. art museums took the initiative to develop or accept Latin American art exhibitions on their own.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

## “Brazil Builds” and Exhibitions From Mexico

MoMA’s interest in Brazilian art developed independently but it coincided with the federal government’s interests in utilizing Brazilian products and troops to help the Allies win the war. Brazil was one of the first nations in Latin America to break off relations with Axis powers. The United States was pleased when Brazil declared war on Italy and Germany in 1942.<sup>103</sup> Cordial U.S. cultural relations with Brazil had also been progressing in the film and music industries, with projects by Orson Welles, Walt Disney, and Carmen Miranda.<sup>104</sup> The United States sent many goodwill missions to Brazil and the US courted the country in numerous ways. Brazil allowed the U.S. to establish military bases on its North Atlantic coast, the closest location to Africa, and made the U.S. its key trade partner for war materials such as rubber, petroleum, ores, minerals, iron, and steel.<sup>105</sup>

Several years earlier, Brazil had created an impressive cultural pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. There Alfred Barr “discovered” Candido Portinari as a major Brazilian artist, judging from three large murals he had painted that were placed on prominent display.<sup>106</sup> Barr and MoMA then independently developed a special exhibition of Portinari’s paintings in 1940; later that year Nelson Rockefeller donated funds to Archibald MacLeish at the Library of Congress to support two wall murals with hemispheric themes painted by Portinari.<sup>107</sup> The

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<sup>103</sup> Ursula Prutsch, “Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs in Brazil.

In *!Americas Unidas! Nelson A Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs 1940-46*, Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch eds. (Frankfurt and Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012), 96-7

German submarines and sabotage of its vessels on the Atlantic had aggravated Brazil.

<sup>104</sup> *Fortune Magazine*, “The Wooing of Brazil” Volume XXIV, Number 4, (October 1941): 97-102.

<sup>105</sup> Prutsch, 2012, 99.

<sup>106</sup> Portinari was actually an Italian ex-patriot whom Brazil had later claimed to represent their nation.

<sup>107</sup> “Portinari of Brazil” October 9-November 17, 1940. See also "[Archibald MacLeish, 9th Librarian of Congress 1939-1944](https://www.loc.gov/about/about-the-librarian/...of-congress/archibald-macleish)" <https://www.loc.gov/about/about-the-librarian/...of-congress/archibald-macleish> (accessed April 2016)

MoMA presented a special exhibition called “Portinari of Brazil.” Thus Candido Portinari became a vetted Brazilian artist at the MoMA and the Library of Congress.

This was a time when some prominent members of the American press such as art critic Emily Genauer were beginning to criticize MoMA for bending to government propaganda. Barr was emphatic in denying that the U.S. government had any part in persuading MoMA to do a Portinari exhibition, as some art critics had suggested. Barr insisted MoMA had itself originated the idea for the exhibition.<sup>108</sup> It was important for MoMA to assert its artistic objectivity during a time when government propaganda and certain kinds of art such as social realism were beginning to be suspect.

Trustee Philip Goodwin, who had been head architect for MoMA’s new building, developed the initial idea for a “Brazil Builds” exhibition working off of his associations with MoMA and his chairmanship of the Committee on Foreign Relations for the American Institute of Architects.<sup>109</sup> Barr gave Goodwin specifications for the exhibition based on MoMA prototypes and Goodwin had the full cooperation of the MoMA staff to produce the show.<sup>110</sup>

The exhibition was to emphasize the excellence of modern Brazilian architecture against a backdrop of three hundred years of Brazilian architectural history. It was to be an original scholarly show painstakingly documented by over one thousand photographs made by well-known architectural writer and photographer G.E. Kidder Smith under the direction of

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<sup>108</sup>Deckker, 2001. Barr letter to Munger Jr. 1941,

<sup>109</sup> “Brazil Builds,” January 13-February 28, 1943. Brazil Builds was a sequel to the successful “Stockholm Builds” (1941) and used its organization as a model. Brazil Builds was much more popular as an exhibition.

<sup>110</sup> “Brazil Builds” was based on an earlier exhibition that MoMA had originated called Sweden Builds.” Deckker 2001,112.

Goodwin, although only a small selection of the entire corpus would be displayed in the catalogue and exhibition.<sup>111</sup>

Although MoMA had independently developed “Brazil Builds,” it became the closest exhibition to approximate OCIAA’s ideal of building cultural bridges between countries without compromising museum integrity. MoMA asserted that the Brazilian government led the Western Hemisphere in encouraging modern architecture and the American and Brazilian press reiterated this as fact.<sup>112</sup> MoMA announced the exhibition contained “some of the finest modern architecture not only in this Hemisphere but in the world” and verified Brazil’s architectural prowess through the production of a major art exhibition that filled nearly “the entire ground floor of the museum with models, enlarged photographs, architectural renderings, drawings, plans, maps, and continuous screen projections of forth-eight color slides.”<sup>113</sup> The press release noted cleverly that the exhibition’s emphasis on the modern architecture of the “colossus of the South” would be complemented by a selection of “Brazil’s beautiful old buildings, many of them famous for their elaborate gold-encrusted interiors.” With this academically compelling project, MoMA, a key American museum, had once again defined a new “National Style” of modern Brazilian architecture.

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<sup>111</sup> Philip L. Goodwin with Photographs by G.E. Kidder Smith. *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old 1652-1942*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943.) Kidder Smith was a World War II Navy photographer and architect who would serve as designer for MoMA’s 1945 “Power in the Pacific.” Many of the illustrations for “Brazil Builds” were taken from the air.

<sup>112</sup> Deckker, 2001, 158.

<sup>113</sup> “Brazilian Architecture Heads New Exhibition Schedule for Museum of Modern Art,” January 13, 1943, [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_press-release\\_325361.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325361.pdf) (accessed August, 2017)

MoMA published the catalogue for “Brazil Builds” in three different languages; it was so successful, three separate editions were printed.<sup>114</sup> Goodwin and Kidder were listed as authors. There was no preface or foreword by a MoMA director.<sup>115</sup> There were no statements or contributions by Brazilian officials or scholars. Philip Goodwin noted in the foreword “The Museum of Modern Art...and the American Institute of Architects in the spring of 1942 were both anxious to have closer relations with Brazil, a country which was to be our future ally.” Brazil was complemented for its national courage “to break away from the safe and easy path.”<sup>116</sup> The catalogue cover was illustrated with the colors of the Brazilian flag.

The coordinating committees helped make the exhibition a major success in Latin America.<sup>117</sup> After its New York showing, the OCIAA traveled “Brazil Builds,” extensively throughout the United States for six years (1943-1948) and throughout Brazil for four years (1943-1946) using its own funds.<sup>118</sup> The international acclaim that the show received made it the most successful exhibition that OCIAA had participated in during the war. U.S. sanction of Brazilian architecture demonstrated that that America had the ability to transform Brazil’s international identity into something greater than what it was before and that the arts could help equalize a Latin American country’s status.

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<sup>114</sup> Philip L. Goodwin with photographs by G.E. Kidder Smith, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old 1652-1942* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943). Published in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

<sup>115</sup> Alfred Barr was dismissed as MoMA director in 1943. (See “Reorganization at Museum of Modern Art. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Retires as Director.”) October 28, 1943, [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_press-release\\_325361.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325361.pdf) (accessed August, 2017) Barr then served as MoMA’s “Director of Collections” until his retirement.

<sup>116</sup> Godwin, 1943, 7 and 92.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ursula Prutsch. “Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs in Brazil.” In Cramer and Prutsch 2012, 249-282.

“Brazil Builds” gave Brazil unprecedented prestige in the world of modern architecture, gaining Brazil world fame in the 1940’s and 1950’s, and was celebrated by architects throughout the world for its progressive modernism.<sup>119</sup> The positive acclaim that MoMA’s project accrued for Brazil was an example of the influence major U.S. art museums could wield. That an American art museum had put itself in the position of making global artistic judgments demonstrated that America could be a judicious arbiter, by proclaiming that Brazilian architecture now leads all other national governments in the Western Hemisphere in modern architecture. The coordinating committees of the OCIAA laid the groundwork for the success of the show in itineraries throughout Brazil. These facts were not lost on Rockefeller and the OCIAA looked for other ways to become involved in Latin American art exhibits that enhanced American prestige.

The OCIAA had learned to maximize its efforts by intervening in art exhibitions after museums had produced them and not before. It now preferred to put most of its efforts into “fast media” rather than the “slow media” of developing exhibitions.<sup>120</sup> The latter category, which included books or art exhibitions, could take a year or more to develop. By that time, the political climate they were intended to affect was likely to have changed. “Fast media” such as radio, magazines, or newsreels could be put together much more quickly; it could address changing political issues or concerns in a much more timely way and affect public opinion more rapidly. *En Guardia*, the attractive, large-format wartime picture magazine OCIAA created on

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<sup>119</sup>Deckker, 2001, 1.

<sup>120</sup> Ninkovich, 1981, 119.

the models of *Look* and *Life* for Latin America is an example of an ideal type of “fast media” that could respond to changing public opinion.<sup>121</sup>

Relatively long lead times were needed for U.S. art museums to do quality work, develop exhibition concepts, get museum staff focused on their tasks, and select, and borrow objects. Museums also had to secure financial support, coordinate loans, establish opening dates and traveling venues, maximize public relations or social events, and plan and execute catalogues. The lack of lead-time could be a drawback of developing art exhibitions for diplomatic purposes and also relationships between two nations could alter with unexpected events or political changes. Another problem, not apparent at the time, was how to separate the diplomatic from the artistic and whether a particular art museum truly believed in the quality of the art it was asked to present.

Between 1943-44 three exhibitions of Mexican art were independently presented by art museums in Philadelphia, Brooklyn, and Chicago. By this time the OCIAA was much less interested in promoting exhibitions on U.S. soil and was now more dedicated to sending art exhibitions to South American countries that had products that were useful for the war effort. Yet several U.S. museums took the initiative to obtain Latin American exhibitions on their own. Two were first prepared by Mexico, shown at *Bellas Artes* and then brought to the United States. One was a joint collaboration between a Mexican art dealer and an American curator.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Carlos Roberto de Souza. “Para la defense de las Americas: The Pictorial Magazine En Guardia in Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Propaganda Campaign for Latin America during World War II.” [Rockarch.org/publication/resrep/desouza.pdf](http://Rockarch.org/publication/resrep/desouza.pdf) (accessed May 2016).

<sup>122</sup> *Bellas Artes* was a national concert hall/fine arts center in neo-classical Italian style built in 1905 by President Porfirio Diaz.



Past exhibitions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art during the 1930's demonstrated an institutional interest in the traditional arts of Mexico that made it logical to develop "Mexican Art Today." Philadelphia's curator of paintings, Henry Clifford, initiated this exhibition after visiting Inés Amor's *Gallería de Arte Mexicano* while on vacation in Mexico City. Subsequent correspondence between Clifford and Amor paved the way for a large exhibition of contemporary Mexican art and Amor facilitated the loans. The Philadelphia Museum of Art opened "Mexican Art Today" in 1943.<sup>123</sup>

An article in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* acknowledged the power of art to foster understanding and improved relationships between the two countries.<sup>124</sup> Press clippings from Philadelphia papers called Mexico 'our sister republic to the south' and suggested the power of the exhibition to unite Mexico and the United States culturally.<sup>125</sup> "Mexican Art Today" traveled to seven more locations in Canada and the United States after Philadelphia. There is evidence that the U.S. State Department provided funding for an extended tour for the exhibition so it could be seen again in Philadelphia and finally in New Orleans.<sup>126</sup>

The Philadelphia and Brooklyn art museums collaborated together to jointly host "José María Velasco: 1840-1912" the following year. Velasco was a 19<sup>th</sup> century painter whose works were considered by Mexico to be national Mexican patrimony, hallowed works of art owned by the Mexican State that must receive permission from the President of Mexico to travel. The exhibition had premiered in Mexico City. Its loan to American museums was organized in

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<sup>123</sup> Rachel Kaplan, "Mexican Art Today: Inés Amor, Henry Clifford and the Shifting Practices of Exhibiting Modern Mexican Art" *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 3, nos. 2 & 3 (2014): 265-276.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid

<sup>125</sup> C.H. Bronte 'Art Museum Has Work by Modern Mexicans', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 28, 1943 (in Kaplan, 2014, 286.

<sup>126</sup> Kaplan, 2014, 285.

collaboration with the *Dirección General de Educación Extra-Escolar y Estetica*, which needed to intervene since the paintings were nationally owned collections and deemed national cultural patrimony. This was an exhibition of iconic artworks that required the approval of President Camacho before the works could leave Mexican terrain. Both U.S. and Mexican ambassadors were involved in the negotiations and the Inter-American office at the NGA had made the arrangements. Art dealer Inés Amor served as “Mexican representative for the exhibition in the United States.” The MoMA staff was thanked in the exhibition catalogue. Ambassadors in both countries were profusely acknowledged. Neither Nelson Rockefeller, the OCIAA staff, nor anyone connected with the State Department were recognized.

“The Art of José Guadalupe Posada,” another important exhibition consisting of national or State-owned cultural patrimony from Mexico requiring governmental consent to travel, was shown at the Chicago Art Institute in 1944. Posada was a 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexican printmaker speaking for the workers and peasants of Mexico, who specialized in political satire and social commentary. A national exhibition of his work created by the noted Mexican intellectual and museum director, Fernando Gamboa, opened in Mexico City. The Director of the Chicago Art Institute, Daniel Catton Rich, had learned of the exhibition and worked directly with the Mexican government to obtain it.

Chicago had a growing Mexican community during World War II, although the previous decade Mexicans in Chicago had faced acute racism during the Depression and the U.S. government repatriated many workers. When wartime industrial demands for labor eased immigration restrictions, Mexican migration to Chicago reached new heights. Between 1943 and 1945, over 15,000 *braceros* or guest workers under contract with the U.S. and Mexican

governments, arrived in the city to work. The Chicago Art Institute played an important social role in honoring Posada and educating the Anglo community about Mexican culture and it had done this independently, without the urging of OCIAA.<sup>127</sup>

In 1944 the State Department gave NGA a grant to support an Inter-American Office. Porter McCray was already occupying space within NGA for OCIAA projects but now he reported directly to its Director, David Finley. McCray stayed there less than a year and then took a permanent position in the exhibition department at MoMA. Margaret Garrett succeeded him and ran the NGA Inter-American Office until 1946 when funding for it ended.

The Inter-American Office was charged with taking over the OCIAA exhibition program. The Office was supposed to serve as an impartial, non-government channel through which exchanges of art materials and information could be conducted. During its two-year existence, the Inter-American Office worked with other art museums such as the MoMA, the Met, Brooklyn Museum, Denver Museum of Art, and Walker Art Center. The Office also coordinated with Time-Life, Inc. to produce goodwill photography exhibitions to send to Latin America. The Brooklyn Museum and the Denver Museum of Art agreed to serve as “assembling points” for Inter-American exhibition projects, in charge of loans from east and west museums where artworks could be packed, insured, and transported to Latin America after the necessary

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<sup>127</sup> European architect Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, then based in Chicago, was asked to design a special explanatory gallery for the exhibition, called “Who is Posada?”

customs and foreign export clearances were obtained.<sup>128</sup> Numerous exhibitions were prepared to promote goodwill between Latin America and the U.S.<sup>129</sup>

Difficulties with one of its exhibitions called “French Nineteenth Century Prints from the Rosenwald Collection” may have been part of the reason the NGA Inter-American Office was discontinued. Lessing J. Rosenwald, a Trustee of the NGA and donor of its extensive Rosenwald Collection of prints, drawings, and miniatures, had begun to give his vast collection to the museum in 1943.<sup>130</sup> The NGA created an exhibition of French nineteenth century prints from the Rosenwald’s Collection to send to Latin America. Despite precautions, there were damages to some of the prints while they were lent to Mexico.<sup>131</sup> Six out of forty-one prints sustained damage though instructions and equipment were provided to protect the prints. One valuable and practically irreplaceable print was almost destroyed. Due to this unfortunate incident, Garrett recommended, “until the security of valuable art can be assured, it was inadvisable to send out other valuable works of art until greater security can be assured for their transportation and installation in the field.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Some of the circulating exhibitions the office offered were “Watercolors USA” which traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paolo, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Santiago, Lima, and Mexico City; “Fine Arts Under Fire; “Modern American Dance; “Jose Maria Velasco Paintings and Drawings;” “Cuban Paintings Today and Water-colors and Drawings by Six Cuban Painters;” “French Nineteenth Century Prints from the Rosenwald Collection;” and “Indian Art Exhibition, a comprehensive exhibition of North American Indian art jointly curated by René d’Harnoncourt and Miguel Covarrubias. The MoMA sent two photography exhibitions to Brazil and Peru: “Look at Your Neighborhood” and “Lesson of War Housing.”

<sup>129</sup> Margaret Garrett, “Report of the Inter American Office: National Gallery of Art, January 1944-May 1946” Available on line (University of Michigan has the original – N856.A8) 14 pages. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015073812987;view=1up;seq=1> (accessed December 2017)

<sup>130</sup> Finley, 1973, 115. Finley devotes a chapter to the Rosenwald Collection but does not mention the French portion of it as being particularly noteworthy.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Margaret Garrett to Francis Henry Taylor dated November 2, 1945. Series F.H.T. 1940-1955. Box 19: File: Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>132</sup> Garrett, 1946,4

There was another unfortunate issue connected with the Rosenwald Exhibition in Mexico. Some anti-American Mexican art critics used the exhibit to deprecate the artistic reputation of the U.S. According to Margaret Garrett, “the selection of French rather than American material...was generally hailed as evidence of our appreciation of the cultural wealth of other nations rather than our own, and of our willingness to share it with Latin America.”<sup>133</sup> The inference from Mexican critics was that the U.S. did not have enough of its own fine art to send to Mexico and instead sent the art of France. These comments were interpreted as decidedly unfriendly and did not foster U.S. Mexican relations.

The NGA terminated its Inter-American office after Truman closed the OCIAA in May 1946 and the State Department funding ended. One of the last exhibitions the office created was in collaboration with *Life Magazine Inc.* and the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas.<sup>134</sup> It was an exhibition of photographs illustrating damage to famous buildings and the discovery in Germany of looted or stored art in the United States zone. Called “Fine Arts Under Fire,” the exhibition circulated widely in the United States and South America.<sup>135</sup> It lauded the efforts of the U.S. military that had “saved” Western art and civilization in Europe.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> See Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>135</sup> “Fine Arts Under Fire” NGA, Ground Floor, Cafeteria Corridor (May 14-June 2, 1946). [https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/1946/arts\\_fire.html](https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/1946/arts_fire.html) (accessed March 2017).

## Evaluating the OCIAA Art Exhibitions

The OCIAA was always conceived as a blend of commercial and cultural purposes, in that order. It tried to use art exhibitions to facilitate positive diplomatic relations and promote economic development. Nelson Rockefeller believed in the power of the visual arts. He depended upon U.S. art museums to create compelling exhibitions that would positively transform public opinion. There were both drawbacks and accomplishments from OCIAA exhibition projects. One of the biggest benefits was that certain art museums in the U.S. began to see the value of originating their own national diplomacy exhibitions.

Nelson Rockefeller's overarching logic for exhibitions was cogent. OCIAA fact-finding reports had concluded that Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile had the greatest potential for development of heavy industries needed for war.<sup>136</sup> These were the very nations for which the OCIAA created art exhibitions and it made sense to do cultural work with them. Yet there were also indications shown by OCIAA surveys that most Americans were simply not interested in Latin America culture unless it was romanticized, stereotyped, or given exotic emphasis. This was a problem that Rockefeller wanted to remedy.

Ordinary people with Latin American backgrounds had a long history of being treated like second-class citizens in many parts of the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; years of racial animosity were hard to erase. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were periods of nativism in certain U.S. cities connected with growing resentment over *bracero* programs and concern that guest agricultural workers would take away jobs. Racial conflict reached a peak in Los Angeles in June 1943 during the Zoot Suit Riots when U.S. servicemen attacked young Hispanics

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<sup>136</sup> Erb, 1982, 258.

and persons of color wearing conspicuous attire and accused them of being un-American during World War II.<sup>137</sup> Interestingly, these issues did not affect the earlier Posada exhibition held in Chicago but they might have done had the exhibition been held on either coast, incorporating another unforeseen element of uncertainty into long-term exhibition planning.

Another problem with OCIAA exhibition strategies had to do with cultural asymmetry. By comparison, the U.S. was a relatively “arts poor” and unsophisticated country. Hence, Latin American countries did not need to cultivate fine arts to the extent that the U.S. did. Although some countries were concerned with modernity, it was not necessarily seen as being manifest in the arts. While the OCIAA was chiefly interested in developing cultural ties through the arts, most Latin American countries had much more severe economic problems and basic infrastructure needs that needed attention.

There were also problems with converting Nelson Rockefeller’s art exhibition philosophies into reality. Major American art museums such as the MoMA or the NGA had their own standards of judgment and agendas. Creating art exhibitions from scratch was a labor-intensive activity; museums were governed by the need to produce new and quality art exhibitions that made sense for their institutions, not necessarily the ones that would promote U.S. political strategies. U.S. art museums could help with government needs in wartime, but they also wanted to pursue international art exhibitions for their own purposes.<sup>138</sup> For art

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<sup>137</sup> Zoot suits were baggy suits worn by minority youths; Anglo-identifying conservatives and members of the military saw the suits as badges of juvenile delinquency since wool had been rationed during the war but a black market for it had developed. Those wearing zoot suits were viewed as unpatriotic.

<sup>138</sup> Such as collection development or increased institutional status and reputation.

museums to “buy into” producing international diplomacy exhibitions, they required an incentive beyond patriotism or government favor that would justify institutional expense.

From OCIAA’s point of view, art exhibitions had the drawback of being “slow media.” It took time to develop and execute them; during that time public opinion or national political concerns could radically change. It took energy to cultivate elite members of a given country, and even more time to wait for the effects to filter down to the rest of the populace. Nelson Rockefeller knew that the key to cultural success in a given country was control of public opinion, which often meant control of the press. The fact that democracy was supposed to be rooted in freedom of speech, openness, and non-authoritarian thought was a definite contradiction. Democratic citizens were not supposed to be told what to see.

One of the biggest problems Rockefeller’s exhibition philosophy faced was the enigmatic nature of the arts themselves, whose meaning was often dependent upon the viewer’s individual interpretation. Arts and propaganda messages did not necessarily align and could result in creating a kind of cultural “Catch-22” situation that negated the freedom of individual interpretation in a democracy. While art exhibitions are never objective, heavy-handed control of an exhibition theme can result in accusations of government propaganda. Yet, if political agencies or governments cannot be assured of a useful outcome of a given project, they will be less inclined to give funds to support it.

By the third year of the agency, Rockefeller and his staff must have recognized that art exhibitions were not the OCIAA’s most effective public relations strategy. Exhibitions required considerable time and complexity to materialize; other media, such as magazines and radio, seemed to work faster and with less expenditure of resources. For example, from the



beginning, the OCIAA also had great success with creating U.S. controlled radio outlets and eliminating Nazi radio stations.

Even though high-level cultural art exhibitions did not ultimately result in serving OCIAA propaganda purposes, the agency's activities had lasting effects on U.S. art museums and the State Department. The State Department continued arts and cultural activities for propaganda purposes after the war but directed them towards Europe, Asia, and places outside of Latin America with which the U.S. government hoped to diplomatically align and/or induce democracy. After World War II, art museums would become self-starting, unofficial partners in U.S. diplomacy or soft diplomacy, but focus their attentions on bringing foreign loan exhibitions onto U.S. soil.

Major American art museums that hosted diplomacy art exhibitions found that working with certain foreign countries garnered their institutions high-status, attention, or interest from the federal government and civic leaders as well as from other high-achieving museums. In order for art museums to develop high quality foreign diplomacy exhibitions, there had to be a locus of directorial, curatorial, or administrative interest. Trustees and/or staff needed to be keenly interested in the arts of a particular place, either because they were interested in developing the museum's permanent collections or because they were interested in acquiring personal ties, political recognition, or power. Art exhibitions with foreign countries, particularly those that were affiliated with ally governments, were important opportunities for directors and curators to travel, pioneer new knowledge, or interpret the arts of other countries. They were also occasions to build civic alliances with sister cities, foster community support for your institution, or otherwise bolster specific institutional strengths or agendas. Nelson Rockefeller's

OCIAA exhibition “experiments” made a significant impact on improving America’s art image among the elites of some Latin America countries but even more notably they gave key U.S. art museums a chance to become diplomatically involved with America’s foreign policy.

Art museums showed themselves to be malleable institutions, and they bonded well with other nations in the arts, an area that was theoretically supposed to be non-controversial and non-political. Museums throughout the world were sister institutions; they shared common understandings, problems, and goals, even if languages or geographic distances provided temporary obstructions. While art museums might have their own ulterior motives for taking on lavish displays of foreign arts, these exhibitions opened up new avenues for museum directors and senior curators. Both MoMA and NGA provided foreign exhibition “models” that other ambitious U.S. museums could follow, as long as they found an institutional justification. In many ways, Nelson Rockefeller had lit a fire under major U.S. art museums that wanted more attention from the federal government or sought ways to become more politically active and socially responsive. He taught them ways to communicate with government officials, maximize their resources, and build “global” alliances.

Through OCIAA projects U.S. art museums learned that there was strength in numbers. Nelson Rockefeller had shown them what collaboration and teamwork outside their isolated institution could accomplish. Art museums or the cities they represented might be competitive with one another, yet they enjoyed the status of banding together and hosting prestigious foreign art exhibitions whose circuits linked them together and offered institution’s a chance to excel. Art museums learned during the war that they weren’t alone; that they could band with other art museums and share resources. Nelson Rockefeller and the structural experiments the

OCIAA generated with exhibition collaborations fostered as sense of *communitas* and political awareness.<sup>139</sup>

Rockefeller had also had an impact on politicians, particularly those involved with cultural matters in the Department of State who had been charged with coordinating the OCIAA's activities such as senators William Benton and J. William Fulbright. Both these men became high visibility examples of leaders who had a major influence on government and the arts in the post-war period. After 1945, the State Department would become even more active in promoting and creating persuasive art exhibitions in Europe.

The next chapter discusses how America projected its growing arts influence and expertise onto Europe. While Rockefeller and the OCIAA were experimenting with art exhibitions in Latin America, U.S. museum professionals and scholars began raising grave concerns about endangered European artworks and cultural monuments threatened by the war. In 1942 they urged President Roosevelt to create a Commission based on the collaboration of art professionals, the federal government, and the U.S. Army. Known as "The Roberts Commission;" its outreach arm was a group of military officers now known as the "Monuments Men," that specialized in the preservation of art and monuments in war-torn places. When a main propaganda goal for the U.S. government during World War II became to save European art and culture from destruction by the Nazi's, art museum professionals were utilized as conduits through which the U.S. government and its military could operate. The

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<sup>139</sup> *Communitas* is a concept from anthropologist Victor Turner that denotes intense feelings of social togetherness and belonging, often in the context of rituals. See Victor Turner. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1975).

following chapter will explore another facet of the US government's interest in the arts during World War II and its active utilization of art museum professionals to improve its arts stature in the world.

## Chapter 5

### **Projecting U.S. Influence Abroad: The Roberts Commission and the Officers of the Monuments, Fine Arts, & Archives Program**

The potential for widespread destruction of art and culture in Europe was of tremendous concern to the American arts community during World War II. It was a problem that needed to be addressed on a federal level since participation of the U.S. military was essential to the solution. This chapter demonstrates how U.S. art museums, the federal government, and its military cooperated to save European art and monuments in wartime. It explains the urgency of the alliance and explains how the work of the Roberts Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic Monuments in War Areas and the officers of the Monuments and the Fine Arts & Archives Program (MFA&A) elevated America's arts profile and gave U.S. art museums heightened authority to collect, exhibit, promote, and interpret world arts.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the chapter discusses Hitler's appropriation and plunder of European art and U.S. efforts to form a stronger cultural apparatus to protect Western civilization. Subsequent sections examine the work of the Roberts Commission and discuss how specially trained arts officers of the MFA&A were tasked with protecting European art and monuments from the devastation of war.<sup>2</sup> The end of the chapter assesses why the alliance between

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Monument's Men" did not come into common use until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. "The Monument's Men" was the title of a 2014 Hollywood film starring George Clooney in which MFA&A monuments officers who saved European treasures were remembered.

<sup>2</sup> There were actually two Roberts Commissions during World War II. This dissertation is concerned with the second Roberts Commission created to help the U.S. Army protect works of cultural value in allied-occupied areas of Europe. Its formal name was the *American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas*.

museum professionals and the military worked well on so many levels and shows how American art museums were changed when MFA&A officers returned home. It also suggests some major ways the museum-government relationship shifted in the immediate aftermath of war.

### **The Rape of Europa: Hitler's Manipulation of the Arts**

Adolph Hitler was a long-time connoisseur of arts and culture who considered European artworks to be integral to his program of political conquest.<sup>3</sup> He believed it was necessary to claim “mistakenly attributed” masterworks from the museums of Europe and restore them to what he considered to be their rightful “Aryan heritage,” thus proving the superiority of Germany throughout the world.<sup>4</sup> His program of Nazi art conquest could not succeed unless something was done to eradicate Europe’s nationalistic passion for its arts as beloved symbols of the individual nations he was planning to crush. In his view, “true arts” of the world must be properly reattached to Germanic origins; any “degenerate, modern, or unfinished arts” of uncivilized races must be eradicated or destroyed. His desire for world dominance of the Aryan race mandated Nazi officials to find key European Old Master artworks and return them to what Hitler felt were their correct Germanic origins.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944). This important book covers in detail the Nazi art machine, personalities involved, the incredible success of the looted art market, and the dramatic rescue, recovery, and restitution of Italian treasures by monuments officers.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> It is well known that Hitler had a personal interest in the arts, though as a young man he had suffered major rejection in them. He was an unsuccessful artist denied admission to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, yet he thought of himself as a connoisseur of the arts. In *Mein Kampf* he ferociously attacked modern art as degenerate, believing Cubism, Futurism, and Dadaism were products of a decadent twentieth century society.

The previous Weimar Regime that had ruled Germany from 1919-1933 made European *avant-garde* art and culture of central importance and encouraged all classes of Germans to appreciate and produce abstract art. Some of Germany's most famous experimental artists were of Jewish origin; Hitler decided he must eliminate all popular taste for abstract art since he believed pure German art contained no abstraction and could not be made by Jews. When he came to power in 1933, he built echelons of sub-leaders to aid with this task, many of whom saw themselves as men of culture.<sup>6</sup>

Hitler understood the power of exhibitions. Sometime during 1936, he decided to order Nazi experts to create a "Degenerate Art Exhibition" to teach all Germans what he considered to be the difference between true and degenerate art. The opening of this exhibition in Munich in 1937 featured over seven hundred and fifty abstract works that had been confiscated from public and private collections. The works were disdainfully installed as "shame art" for all proper Nazis to see.<sup>7</sup> "According to Hitler, "It is not the mission of art to wallow in filth for filth's sake, to paint the human being only in a state of putrefaction, to draw cretins as symbols of motherhood or to present deformed idiots as representatives of manly strength."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>7</sup> See Berhold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, Translated from the German by Robert and Rita Kimber. (NY: Pantheon Books, 1979), 40-1. There were nine sections of the exhibition: Barbarous Representation, Revelations of German Jewish Religiosity, Political Origins of Degeneration, Art as a Tool of Marxist Propaganda Against Military Service, The Whole World as a Whorehouse, Prostitution and Pimps, Eradication of Non-German Racial Ideals, Modern Art, Jewish Trash, Total Madness, Works done by the Mentally ill.<sup>7</sup> It is not known whether Hitler defined these categories or simply approved their use.

<sup>8</sup> Mario-Andreas Von Luttichau. "Entartete Kunst, Munich, 1937. A Reconstruction."

In *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* by Stephanie Barron (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1991), 46.

Hitler's enormous exhibition of *schandausstellung* or degenerate arts was installed in a deliberately sensational and insulting manner.<sup>9</sup> Works were displayed in rows, over burlap-covered walls, inside narrow galleries. They were shown without frames, hung askew, and given ill-formed or insulting explanatory labels. This type of mockery would have been astonishing to German audiences who were used to giving the arts and art exhibitions utmost respect. The Hitler regime promoted the Degenerate Art Exhibition and publicized it to such heights that it broke all existing attendance records for art exhibitions in Munich.<sup>10</sup>

After its Munich venue, the exhibition circulated to seven other major cities. Over two million people saw the show in Munich; over three million had been exposed to it after it had been shown in Berlin, Leipzig, Dusseldorf, Weimar, Halle, Vienna, and Salzburg.<sup>11</sup> Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, his Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, interpreted these astonishing attendance figures as signs of victory and success; evidence that the people at large must surely support their regime and agreed with their associated notions of "degenerate art."<sup>12</sup>

After defining degenerate art to their satisfaction, Hitler and his men were then faced with another problem: What kind of legitimate German art should the Reich promote? Hitler believed there were no modern or living German artists whose work was worthy of his admiration. He was quite fond of 19<sup>th</sup> century German realistic paintings, but he wanted to go

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 31-3. This was not an original idea. Evidently there were previous "shame exhibitions" sponsored by reactionary and anti-modernist elites after 1933 that were precursors to Hitler's 1937 exhibition.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 57-58.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. This figure was three times the total attendance of visitors who attended Hitler's subsequent "Great German Art Exhibition" of representative art that was presented later the same year.

<sup>12</sup> Christoph Zuschlag. "An Educational Exhibition: The Precursors of Entartete Kunst and its Individual Venues." In Barron, 1991, 83-103.



further. He decided it was necessary to “reclaim” key representational works by European Old Masters such as Rembrandt or Michelangelo. He wanted to bring back outstanding realistic works and return them to their rightful or authentic Germanic origins. Since the Aryan race was, in his view, the leader of great world culture, German art and culture must be elevated above the arts of all other nations, and institutionally validated for all to see.

Hitler imagined his future “Führermuseum” to be built in the Austrian city of Linz, which was his birthplace.<sup>13</sup> This museum was to constitute one of the great national galleries in Europe and be part of a vast cultural complex for Nazi Germany that overshadowed all other museums of Europe.<sup>14</sup>

To obtain collections the Nazis used Reich-controlled museums and the existing art community to facilitate their search and seizure efforts. They needed experienced museum directors, art handlers, dealers, and researchers who sympathized with the Nazi cause and who had the technical abilities to professionally identify, verify, value, and transport art.<sup>15</sup> All of this took careful planning and implementation to make sure that no desirable artworks in foreign cities were inadvertently destroyed during the war.<sup>16</sup> This kind of art treatment was called *kunstschutz* or “art protection” and consisted of art historians in various occupied countries who may not have been Nazis themselves but reported to German military governors.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> James S. Plaut, “Hitler’s Capital” *The Atlantic* 178, no. 4 (October 1946).

<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/flashbks/nazigold/hitler.htm> (accessed February 2016)

<sup>14</sup> Martin Bormann, ed., *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941-1944*. Translated by Norman Cameron Stevens, R.H. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), 445-446.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World of Nazi Germany* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000), 14. German museum directors were often Nazis; their degree of party membership rivaled that of physicians.

<sup>16</sup> Frederic Spotts. *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock, New York, 2002), 187-220.

Spotts suggests that something around 7,000 artworks had been confiscated for the Führermuseum and that many others would have been added to that number had Hitler won the war.

<sup>17</sup> Marvin C. Ross. “The Kunstschutz in Occupied France” *College Art Journal* 5, no. 4 (May, 1946): 336-352.

Declaring to museum officials that certain works were simply being relocated for purposes of security, Hitler's workers seized masterpieces of Dutch, French, and Italian art, transported them to Germany, and hid them in salt mines, monasteries, or warehouses.<sup>18</sup> Museums were told that their prize works were being protected and would be subsequently returned. However, there was no intent to ever return works to their originating museums, for they were destined for Linz. Scholars were employed to write new patrimonies or provenances for the works and explain how the original Germanic impulses of these countries had been lost over time due to misguided changes in political societies or governments.<sup>19</sup>

Working under key Nazi administrators, teams of museum workers constructed detailed albums of works with photographs, descriptions, and locations. Hitler himself reviewed these compilations and personally selected the artworks he believed were worthy of Germanic origin.<sup>20</sup> As for abstract or non-figurative works that many German museums had collected before the advent of the Nazis, these were removed, destroyed by public bonfire, or if they had any value, were sold abroad. Because so much of Nazi art transactions were covert, the media did not investigate and instead concerned itself with describing mass destruction of cities and monuments. The rest of the world did not necessarily hear about these museum losses but they did notice that abstract European works formerly in museums were creating a rather vigorous art market. Major American art museums such as the MoMA that could afford to buy

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<sup>18</sup> Nicholas, 1994, 78.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas, 1994, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, 1946, 336-352.

“degenerate” European works at auction definitely benefited, and justified their art purchases as “saving them.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Strengthening the U.S. Art and Culture Apparatus**

Hitler’s art purges and destruction of hallowed European cities horrified the American arts community but its leaders did not have the experience of working through government offices for assistance and support.<sup>22</sup> Many recognized that it would be necessary to strengthen the U.S. cultural apparatus at home and abroad so it could act at full capacity to save European art and monuments. The U.S. government had made some progress in strengthening and creating more cultural agencies in the 1930’s, but most of them operated on an individual level with very limited federal support.<sup>23</sup> Most states, regions, or cities had established their own cultural organizations but there was no national umbrella organization to coordinate all cultural affairs.<sup>24</sup>

Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress, was concerned about the need to protect the nation’s valuable books and public documents from being destroyed on U.S. soil. Britain had asked the U.S. to safeguard the *Magna Carta* and the Library of Congress had agreed to do so.<sup>25</sup> MacLeish felt it was only a matter of time before the U.S. joined the war and materials here would be vulnerable. He suggested building a national safe depository to President

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<sup>21</sup> Nicholas. 1994, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Doheny, 2006, 207-211.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of federal agencies established in the 1930’s were The Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian, the National Park Service, the Historic Sites Board, the National Archives, and the NGA.

<sup>24</sup> Jane Aikin, “Preparing for a National Emergency: The Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources, 1939-1944” *The Library Quarterly* 77, No. 3 (July, 2007): 257-285.

<sup>25</sup> David C. Mearns and Verner W. Clapp, *Magna Carta: The Lincoln Cathedral Copy Exhibited in the Library of Congress* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1941).

Roosevelt, but at that stage the President believed the American people did not want to get involved with the war in Europe and the costs of building a depository seemed prohibitive. Neither the Executive Branch nor any federal agency wanted to put funds towards more secure storage facilities for cultural resources.<sup>26</sup>

David Finley, Director of NGA, and other cultural administrators at the New York Public Library and the National Archives who shared common preservation and conservation concerns joined MacLeish and began communicating with one another.<sup>27</sup> It seemed both impractical and unfair for each institution to create its own solutions. While an advisory National Resources Planning Board (NRPB) existed, it had nothing to do with cultural resources and was focused on distributing knowledge between business and government groups.<sup>28</sup> An alliance of cultural leaders, headed by MacLeish, gradually formed and approached the NRPB to see if it would help devise a working structure for sharing national cultural resources, with a fallback position that if they were denied assistance they would organize independently and seek their own private support.<sup>29</sup>

The NRPB surprised them. By March 1940 it created another branch of itself as a focused committee called the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources (CCCR).<sup>30</sup> Here, at last, was a structure that could bring cultural leaders together and encourage exchange or development of collaborative ideas. The first action of the group was to prepare a fifty-three-page handbook that gave general recommendations for types of culture that could be adapted

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<sup>26</sup> Aiken, 2007, 257-285.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 261.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick D. Reagan, *Designing a New America: The Origins of New Deal Planning 1890-1943* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000.)

<sup>29</sup> Aikin, 2007, 263.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 263

to diverse institutions nationwide.<sup>31</sup> This constituted an early example of emergency interdepartmental cooperation and planning in the absence of direct federal support.

The handbook was modeled on best practices described by British and European institutions that had prepared for or undergone stresses of war. It focused on how to make general surveys of institutional holdings, how to determine the best protective measures or minimize the effects of an attack, how to use available materials to pad and protect artworks, and how to select the best off-site depositories and create safe storage units instead affected buildings.

These suggestions demonstrated the resourcefulness of technical museum workers who were used to making the best of a difficult situation. Personnel were told to divide their collections into three categories: material of such importance its safety must be insured at all costs, material of relative value which would constitute serious potential loss, and material whose loss would not be a major handicap.

Workers were admonished to work quickly in case of emergency and not place too many works in the first category.<sup>32</sup> The collaborative work to create the CCCR handbook was a good first step in building the kind of American coordination for what would soon become the high-powered Roberts Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic Monuments In War Areas. In the process, museums learned how to work with government agencies.

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<sup>31</sup> Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources, *The Protection of Cultural Resources Against the Hazards of War: A Preliminary Handbook* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, February, 1942).

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

David Finley was a huge asset to the planning because he understood the separate worlds of museum administration and government bureaucracy.<sup>33</sup> He saw that nothing would protect the nation's arts and cultural materials unless cultural leaders with the prestige of their institutions behind them took it upon themselves to act. Very little support was to be expected from Congress, not only because there was not a nationwide model but also because after 1942, Congress was controlled by a conservative coalition that was hostile to art programs from the New Deal.<sup>34</sup> Finley knew only too well from experiences with Andrew Mellon that the federal government needed to be prodded and properly approached before it would act. It was important to know who were the movers and shakers and how to write effective memoranda that would inspire government officials to act efficiently and for political gain. Finley took the lead in coordinating cultural and government officials and teaching other cultural administrators solid lessons in how to deal with the federal government.<sup>35</sup>

### **Formation of The Roberts Commission**

The need for a special arts commission was evident to intellectual elites and art museum administrators. Members of art agencies, and institutions of higher learning also became aware. Leaders actively lobbying for such a commission were associated with the NGA, Harvard University, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Federation of Arts, or the American Institute of Architects. In spring of

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<sup>33</sup> Doheny, 2006,163.

<sup>34</sup> Reich, 1996, 507.

<sup>35</sup> Many other times art museums such as the Met had tried to approach government officials in the 1930's for assistance with international exhibitions, but either lacked sufficiently high contacts or the ability to lay out their case in a straight-forward political manner.

1940, a group of faculty at Harvard had formed the American Defense Harvard Group whose mission it was to educate the public about the possibility of war and rally efforts for national defense.<sup>36</sup> In 1943, the American Council of Learned Societies established a separate “Committee on Protection of Cultural Treasures in War Areas” based out of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>37</sup>

Under the direction of David Finley, leaders of such groups approached Chief Justice Harlan F. Stone, who was a close friend of President Roosevelt as well as President of the NGA Board. Assisted by Finley, Stone presented a proposal to President Roosevelt to establish a government commission to protect and salvage European artistic and historical monuments. The commission had two purposes: to create a government body to protect and conserve European artworks, historic monuments and archives, and to make restitution of such works to their lawful owners after the war. It was further suggested that British and Soviet governments also be encouraged to establish similar bodies.<sup>38</sup>

In reply to Stone’s proposal of December 28, 1942, Roosevelt responded he would refer the proposal “to appropriate agencies for study.”<sup>39</sup> Nothing happened for four months and then a second letter from the President to Stone informed him that the proposal had won the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and that approaches were being made to British and

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<sup>36</sup> *Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (The Roberts Commission), 1943-1946* (RG 239). Civilian Agency Records, National Archives at College Park, College, Park Maryland, 1. <https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-239.html> (accessed July 2017)

<sup>37</sup> *Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946, 1-3. [https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/related-records/rg\\_239](https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/related-records/rg_239). (accessed July 2017)

<sup>38</sup> Civilian Agency Records, RG 239, 1. <https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-239.html>. (accessed August 2017)

<sup>39</sup> Doheny, 2006, 207-11.

Soviet governments.<sup>40</sup> Since the State Department was the proper agency to organize the commission, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, with the advice of Finley, wrote to President Roosevelt in June 21, 1943, informing him that a special section had been set up in the School of Military Government to train certain officer-specialists who could be assigned to army staffs to advise commanding officers regarding cultural monuments and historic artworks in war zones.<sup>41</sup> Finley supplied all the names and details of qualified personnel for Hull's authorization and specified exactly how the Commission could work with the army to obtain information, maps, and lists. After the war, the Commission was to make sure that restitution in kind be made by Axis powers for any works that had been looted or destroyed. Finley agreed that the Commission should be "quartered" inside the National Gallery of Art in order to facilitate contact with the Departments of War and State.<sup>42</sup> With Finley's descriptions and Hull's authorization, President Roosevelt approved the creation of the Roberts Commission on June 23, 1943. Two months later, Hull formally announced the establishment of the Commission in a State Department press release.<sup>43</sup>

During months of bureaucratic back and forth, Finley had worked behind the scenes to trouble-shoot, push the Commission through, insure that all the necessary people in power were informed by correct protocol, and advise the best ways to expedite the workings of powerful departments. His self-effacing style probably helped to preclude ruffled feathers or

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Harlan Stone, December 28, 1942. RG 239, Box 51. National Archives at College Park, MD.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Cordell Hull to Franklin D. Roosevelt, June 21, 1943. RG 239, box 39. National Archives at College Park, MD.

<sup>42</sup> Civilian Agency Records RG 239, 2. <https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-239.html> (accessed January 2017)

<sup>43</sup> See *Department of State Bulletin*, August 21, 1943, 111.



imagined territorial slights.<sup>44</sup> He must have advised museum directors and other officials that even with the Roberts Commission, they would still have to dig deep into their own institutional resources. The individual members of the Roberts Commission were well chosen and consisted of eight people: one judicial authority, three museum professionals, a key university connection, and three federal officials with useful contacts, all of whom were ambitious and skilled professionals with the ability to make such a complicated organization comprised of such diverse individuals work.<sup>45</sup>

Finley chose the most experienced and flexible people, each representing a particular political minefield, and virtually all enthusiastically agreed to serve.

Owen J. Roberts, Justice of the Supreme Court, took the place of Chief Justice Harlan Stone as the Commission Chairman.<sup>46</sup> Finley, who became Vice-Chairman, did much of the actual organizing, practical legwork, politicking, and communicating.<sup>47</sup> His close colleague, Huntington Cairns, who was also Secretary-Treasurer of NGA, became secretary-treasurer of the Commission.

Other Roberts Commission members included Herbert H. Lehman, Director of the Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations for the Department of State. Lehman, who was a veteran of World War I, was well acquainted with the Army, was also one of the founders of the financial services firm Lehman Brothers, and a prominent art collector. Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress and Director of the War Department's Office of Facts and Figures, was

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<sup>44</sup>Doheny, 2006, 207-11.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Stone declined to serve as Chairman because he had too much work to do directing the Supreme Court.

<sup>47</sup>Doheny, 2006, 207-11.

also on the Commission.<sup>48</sup> William Bell Dinsmoor, President of the Archaeological Institute of America and Chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies, agreed to serve on the Commission. Other members included Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and President of the Association of Art Museum Directors and Paul Sachs, Associate Director of Harvard's Fogg Museum of Fine Arts and mentor of the "Museum Course" that placed museum directors and arts professionals in museums throughout America.<sup>49</sup>

These individuals constituted an amazing blend of talent, manpower, and administrative ability, particularly with David Finley at the helm. Yet one of the most attractive selling points for the President and Congress surely must have been that in addition to expressing America's highest cultural ideals and talent, the commission theoretically required little expenditure of government funding and was in fact operating separately from Congress.

Scholars and museum professionals were so passionate about the need for the Commission that they willingly donated their time and expertise. Key individuals could attract the talents of other ambitious people who could also freely contribute their time and expertise for this aspect of the war effort and supply buildings and resources from their home institutions. If existing cultural leaders were utilized, the Commission could be built inexpensively with a diverse group of organizations, virtually all of which would be willing to work without monetary compensation. Another reason that the Roberts Commission was acceptable to members of the federal government was undoubtedly that its commitment towards saving European arts was only be for a limited time period. The restitution portion of

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<sup>48</sup> MacLeish was appointed Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs in 1944 and became involved with the United Nations at the end of the war.

<sup>49</sup> Doheny, 2006, 207-211.

the Commission's objectives was also time-limited and justified as an important part of punishing the Axis powers.

The Commission organized itself into seven taskforces, each with its own specific duties and concerns.<sup>50</sup> Finley headed three key committees: the Committee on the Definition of Works of Cultural Value and Property, the Committee on Administrative Organization, and the Committee on Art Instruction in Military Schools. Archibald MacLeish was chairman of the Committee on Books, Manuscripts, and Other Printed and Written Material of Cultural Value. William Dinsmoor and Paul Sachs co-chaired the Committee on the Collection of Maps, Information, and Description of Art Objects. Paul Sachs, aided by W.G. Constable, headed the Committee on Personnel. Francis Henry Taylor chaired the Committee on Axis-Appropriated Property, with the aid of John Walker of the NGA, Daniel Catton Rich of the Chicago Art Institute, and career diplomat Robert Woods Bliss.<sup>51</sup>

Using universities and established centers of higher learning the School of Military Government, which was staffed by museum professionals, trained officer-specialists or "monuments officers" who advised the Army's commanding officers about cultural monuments and endangered arts in war zones. Candidates for monuments officers were identified from the detailed files of Paul Sachs documenting his past students.<sup>52</sup> These were exceptional men already occupying key positions in museums and who would hardly turn down a request to

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<sup>50</sup> *Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas 1946*. (Washington, D.C: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), 10-

11. <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/related-records/rg>. (accessed March, 2017)

<sup>51</sup> Bliss was a special assistant to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull in 1944 and also a member of the Advisory Committee for the State Department and the OCIAA.

<sup>52</sup> *Papers of Paul J. Sachs, 1878-1965. A Guide*. Harvard Art Museum Archives, Houghton Library. Harvard University,

serve their country, particularly if they were given official leave by their museum boards to participate in this important patriotic duty. Most museums considered it a complement to their institution to give this service, often publicizing it through their press offices or membership magazines.

There was a strong nationalistic or political component to many of these committees. In a sense, America was establishing expertise by amending, crafting, or re-defining its own hierarchy of European art. American scholars and administrators were creating new knowledge and determining which European monuments or artworks should receive priority. The committees of Definition of Works of Cultural Value and Property and the Collection of Maps, Information, and Descriptions were responsible for defining locations and priorities and creating maps and handbooks to be used in the field.<sup>53</sup>

In many ways American expertise was now calling the cultural shots for Europe. Since none of this material was already compiled, it had to be invented and collected, organized, explained in layman's terms, and assembled for military use. American scholars and students having expertise in various places willingly gave their time and talents. Prioritizing and deciding the contents of these handbooks or manuals – identifying what monuments and works were most important to save – actually resulted in an American compilation or assessment of European art and culture.

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<sup>53</sup> Civilian Agency Records RG 239: Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (The Roberts Commission), 1944-1946 (RG), 1. 239).<https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-239.html>, (accessed May 17, 1917)

Working through the American Defense-Harvard Group and the American Council of Learned Societies, the Commission supplied the armed forces with over seven hundred maps of important cultural centers in Europe and also the Far East.<sup>54</sup>

It also prepared and distributed lists and handbooks to MFA&A officers to assist them in the field and correlated all reports made by MFA&A officers after they had visited various sites and done their work. It also gathered information on qualified civilian personnel in foreign countries who replaced military personnel after the war when military governments were transferred to civilian hands.<sup>55</sup>

The Roberts Commission provided an essential conduit between arts professionals, museums personnel, and the military, all of who were concerned with the protection of European art in wartime for their own reasons. It took time for these groups to learn how understand how to properly communicate and work with government agencies and military leaders. This learning curve was an essential step for museum professionals to master during the war. After the war, museums would know how to make more effective or efficient political maneuvers and the government/military would hopefully obtain a better understanding of the art world and its relationship to American society.

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<sup>54</sup> Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (The Roberts Commission), 1943–1946 (RG 239). National Archives.

<https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-239.html> (accessed January 2017)

<sup>55</sup> *Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas*. (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1946).

## The Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section of the U.S. Army

The Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Program (MFA&A) was officially established within the Civil Affairs and Military Governments sections of the Allied Forces in 1943.<sup>56</sup> Officers in this program were trained in special skills in art protection and they needed to be well acquainted with proper U.S. Army operations. The program was incorporated into the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP).<sup>57</sup> Conducted at more than two hundred U.S. universities during World War II, ASTP offered training in fields like engineering, foreign languages, and medicine, and operated under the philosophy that areas of conquest would need to be “de-Nazified” by professionals in these fields.<sup>58</sup> Though conservative politicians generally disliked ASTP programs and the funding for many of them became sporadic, they were intended to make productive alliances with needy civilian populations in foreign countries who required relief. Most of the ASTP programs did not last for more than one year and the MFA&A would be the only exception that endured.<sup>59</sup>

Over four hundred MFA&A officers were trained to work with Army forces to safeguard European works and if necessary eventually repatriate them.<sup>60</sup> The better trained these technical sections were, the more easily they could liaison with existing civilian governments, help, and gain the trust of local populations. These specially trained officers needed to speak

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<sup>56</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1943, General, Vol. 1, The Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, 6-23-43. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocs/tru1943v01/d96>. (accessed July 2017)

<sup>57</sup> Louis E. Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes The Story of the Army Specialized Training Program in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1988).

<sup>58</sup> The information in this paragraph derives from Civilian Agency Records RG 239, pp. 2-4. <https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-239.html>. (accessed July 2017)

<sup>59</sup> Keefer, 1988.

<sup>60</sup> *Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas*. (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1946).

knowledgeably and sincerely so people would obey them. Their authority with civilian populations rested on making solid judgments and accessing the most current expertise. This kind of instruction was very different from Army training in the past and required time and resources to develop.<sup>61</sup> Whether wooing prospective donors or meeting important cultural leaders diplomatic skills had always been important in upper levels of art museum professions.

In addition to arts expertise and diplomatic talents, MFA&A officers needed to learn and adhere to army protocol, procedures, and regulations. They had to frequently touch base with those in command to let them know what they were contemplating and what they had accomplished. They had to work between foreign civilian populations and Allied personnel before, during, and after battle to safeguard monuments and art from war damage, assess any destruction that had occurred, and make official reports. When the war came to a close they were expected to find and return portable works of art and other items of cultural importance that had been stolen by the Nazis or hidden by people for safekeeping.<sup>62</sup>

The Army created specific job descriptions for MFA&A responsibilities and operational functions.<sup>63</sup> For example, in Italy the mission was

To prevent as far as possible destruction of and damage to historical monuments, buildings, works of art and historical records...to safeguard and preserve them, and to give first aid in repairs when needed; and to assist in the recovery and restitution to their rightful owners of any works of art which have been looted, removed or otherwise appropriated.<sup>64</sup>

There were then seven major responsibilities enumerated that the MFA&A officer must fulfill that were specific to Italy:

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<sup>61</sup> Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *Civilian Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History U.S. Army 1986), 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 419: Statement of Dir., MFA&A, 23 Mar 44, ACC files, 10000/105/175.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

...advise on orders issued by commanders to their troops, maintain liaison with ground and air forces to furnish them with adequate information, help formulate and distribute plans and directives, collaborate with other sub-commissions, interface with Public Relations and prepare and/or approve publicity on monuments and fine arts, act in advisory capacity to the Italian Ministry of Education, and submit reports on matters relating to preservation and protection of monuments and art objects.<sup>65</sup>

Under “Operational Functions” officers were supposed to prepare regional and provincial lists of monuments, providing measures to safeguard them, advise unit commanders on needed requisitions, collect information on damages that have occurred to monuments, investigate reports of alleged looting, and recommend appropriate action for restitution.<sup>66</sup> MFA&A officers were also to aid agencies in the Italian government who are responsible for war damage and repairs.<sup>67</sup> MFA&A officers were given great leeway in individual job management since the military considered fighting the war its first priority rather than protecting artworks.

The level at which the MFA&A officers were supposed to operate was essentially mid to high level managerial, but there were difficulties with fitting these activities into existing military structures and ranking. In truth, these officers were given relatively low rankings as junior officers.<sup>68</sup> They traveled within regular Army units and their specific tasks had to be properly coordinated and monitored by commanding officers and officially accounted for in military budgets or memorandums. The Army required a regular reporting procedure to captains, lieutenants, or generals. When mistakes occurred, they had to be reported, resolved, and rectified with copies to extenuating personnel.<sup>69</sup> The burgeoning responsibilities of the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 420

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 423

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 876.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



MFA&A officers did not match their relatively low ranking, and officers believed their lower rank limited the authority they needed to be effective in the field. The problem became exacerbated when MFA&A officers compared themselves to their British counterparts who were doing the same work but had been given much higher military rankings.

Despite these frustrations, MFA&A officers probably felt a surge of pride that was added motivation to perform this demanding work. Officer Walter Farmer, for example, was thrilled to be “among the high priesthood of the American museum profession.”<sup>70</sup> Although he was given few instructions and was often left to improvise or trouble-shoot, his memoir describes how he had to seek out looted collections, oversee rehabilitations of buildings, or inspect nearby storage areas. He needed to find former European army engineers to help who were skilled in communicating with local people and to find spaces to store the art. Sometimes he had to evict or displace persons or clear out old army warehouse units that were used to store uniforms and rations. He tried to instruct civilian workers in assembly-line techniques, endeavored to manage work crews, or scavenge lights from wrecked jeeps and repurpose them to light buildings. He hired former members of European museum staffs to help with collection management but this often included feeding them, helping them to find clothes, or helping them search for lost family members.

Monument Officer C.R. Pinsent, who was subsequently issued the title of captain, reported complications with the Army Engineers unit in Florence over saving the facades and

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<sup>70</sup> Walter I. Farmer, *The Safekeepers: A Memoir of the Arts at the End of World War II* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 27.

tower in Via Guicciardini and Via Por Santa Maria.<sup>71</sup> The Army Engineers refused to risk their men's lives working with heavy machinery in between dangerous city walls, so the presiding MFA&A Officer Enthoven took over the responsibility of doing the shoring and clearing. Then the Engineers changed their minds and started pushing their machines around without adequate precautions. When the Engineers inadvertently destroyed Norrey Church, an already-damaged building not on the Official List of Protected Monuments, the local people protested and the case created harmful publicity for the Allies' cause that then needed to be rectified.<sup>72</sup>

Sometimes there were disconnects, when officers became over-zealous in their mission, were obstinate, or insisted upon a too-aggressive approach. They took their work very seriously. Yet the exchange of memoranda in the field seems to have been overcome on both sides because of the urgency of the war and the necessity to continue on with other emergencies. Probably no one had the time and energy to fight personal political battles, and most likely the officers in charge were adept at nipping petty misunderstandings in the bud, given the larger stakes of the mission and how the army operates.

Gradually, the Army rectified gaps in its procedures and covered expenses. If funds were not present for urgent MFA&A work, then the Army would requisition things like vehicles, tires or gasoline from its own budgets that would enable officers to go into the field and do their work.<sup>73</sup> Often a troop would have to arrive at a battle location ahead of time so an MFA&A officer could insure that the coast was clear for battle or to inform local people that war might

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<sup>71</sup> Coles and Weinberg, 1986, *Complications in Protection of Antique*; Ltr. Capt. C.R. Pinsent, MFA&A, AMG, City of Florence to Perkins, 24 Sep 44, ACC files, 10000/145/71.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 416.

be imminent and they must protect their artworks and monuments accordingly. Working in the field required a no-nonsense, nuts and bolts attitude, a seat of the pants approach to solving problems or damage assessment. Connoisseurship assessments of artworks, so common to art museums, were completely irrelevant. Officers had to efficiently evaluate a situation, decide on the spot what to do, communicate the information in a clear manner to superiors, and follow orders. There was also a “treasure-hunt” aspect to the work and a potential sense of heroism on the part of the monument’s officer.<sup>74</sup>

Smooth operational collaborations took time and patience to work out between the MFA&A officers and the military but the urgency of war pushed them to consensus so each side could move on and complete their orders. In the process, MFA&A officers were learning the habits and thinking of military life and gaining insights into local cultures with which they were engaged.

### **Art, General Eisenhower, and Positive Public Relations**

An interface between the military and the visual world was facilitated by the urgency of war, the need for high morale and patriotism, and positive public relations. Branches of the military had already been participating in a program of “combat art” in museum exhibitions back home that were popular with the public back home as well as enlisted men on leave. *Life* magazine actively collaborated on many of these exhibitions.

Magazine editors were anxious to cover the visual side of the war for their reading public, showing the heroic and human side of war to increase sales. Weekly issues were filled

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<sup>74</sup> Farmer, 2000, 39-46.

with lavish photographs and photo essays about the war. Editors gravitated towards images of destroyed monuments, noticing that such images increased readership. It was apparent to leaders in the military and government that good public relations and propaganda helped the war effort and that positive media was an important key.<sup>75</sup>

General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), accepted MFA&A officers as a necessary part of the war effort. General George Marshall first alerted Eisenhower to the importance of protecting artistic and historic monuments in Italy in a memorandum of October 1943.<sup>76</sup> Marshall suggested avoiding destruction of immovable works of art insofar as possible without handicapping military operations. A second memorandum to Eisenhower from John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, noted,

Crimes are being committed in the name of military necessity that I think could be avoided by some pronouncement from you...With a little more effort and some greater inconvenience you can billet troops elsewhere than in the midst of a scientific collection...or the Naples Museum. We have been running many articles in the States as to the good work of the armies in Italy toward respecting the great monuments of Italy.<sup>77</sup>

David Finley had, in fact, made several personal appeals to McCloy to push for cultural protection and take a stand on destruction of European monuments.<sup>78</sup> This is an example of how civilian influence can affect national policy.

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Griffin, "The Great War Photographs: Constructing Mythos of History and Photojournalism" in *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography*, Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 122-157.

<sup>76</sup> Cable from General Marshall to General Eisenhower Regarding Protection of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Italy, October 14, 1943 (Eisenhower's Pre-Presidential Papers, Principal File, Box 132, Cables Official (GCM/DDE) July 29, 1943-February 19, 1944 (3); NAID #7585075).

<sup>77</sup> Memorandum from John J. McCloy to General Eisenhower, December 13, 19143 (Eisenhower's Pre-Presidential Papers, Principal File, Bo 75, NAID #7584064).

General Eisenhower's December 29, 1943 directive to all commanders clearly stated the need to reconcile military necessity with the ideals of preserving European monuments and art:

Today we are fighting in a country, which has contributed, a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments, which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization, which is ours. We are bound to respect those monuments so far as war allows.

If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the buildings must go. But the choice is not always so clear cut as that. In many cases the monuments can be spared without any detriment to operational needs. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity. That is an accepted principle. But the phrase "military necessity" is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference.

It is a responsibility of higher commander to determine through AMG Officers the locations of historical monuments whether they are immediately ahead of our front lines or in areas occupied by us. This information passed to lower echelons through normal channels places the responsibility on all Commanders of complying with the spirit of this letter.<sup>79</sup>

Here, at last, was a clear description of art and culture, in language the men of military could accept. It laid the responsibility for cultural protection heavily on the shoulders of commanders. It put art and culture into a concrete, pragmatic framework that the Army could easily absorb.

Yet another important step remained: to reconcile military and MFA&A actions with positive public relations abroad. There could be serious political fall-out from harmful propaganda, either from critical institutions, media inside the U.S., or enemy foreign press. It took the bombing of Monte Cassino Abbey near Rome, Italy, on February 15, 1944, where Germans were reportedly housed, to create a more solid understanding of the harmful results of negative propaganda.

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<sup>79</sup> Coles and Weinberg. 2004, 417. Allied CINC Insists Excuse of Military Necessity will be Fully Justified. (Directive, Eisenhower to All Cmdrs., 30 29 Dec 43, ACC files, 10700/145/1).

Axis propaganda took advantage of the Monte Cassino incident, building an embarrassing case that the Allies were carelessly destroying Italian culture through excessive American-led air raids that resulted in the deaths of innocent women and children.<sup>80</sup> For several months, the Monte Cassino incident caused great public debate at home that gave the U.S. military grave concern. *Life* magazine stepped in to neutralize the situation and General Eisenhower had to work hard to put a positive spin on the incident and issue another corrective memorandum that would restate military priorities in no uncertain terms:

It is the responsibility of every commander to protect and respect these symbols (historical monuments and cultural centers which symbolize to the world all that we are fighting to preserve) whenever possible. [Yet], the lives of our men are paramount...where military necessity dictates, commanders may order the required action even though it involves the destruction of some honored site...there are many circumstances in which damage and destruction are not necessary and cannot be justified. In such cases through the exercise of restraint and discipline, commanders will preserve centers and objects of historical and cultural significance.”<sup>81</sup>

Hence, the lives of our fighting men must come first, but protection of cultural and historic monuments must be a close second.

On April 2, 1946, General Eisenhower received an honorary Life Fellowship from the AAMD at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When conferring the award, Director Francis Henry Taylor stated that General Eisenhower “more responsible than any other, made it possible for a world in which great civilizations of the past could continue for future

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<sup>80</sup> Melissa Renn, “Fine Arts Under Fire: Life Magazine and the display of architectural destruction.” In *Architecture and Armed Conflict: The Politics of Destruction*, JoAnne Marie Mancini and Keith Bresnahan, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 72-8.

<sup>81</sup> Memorandum from General Dwight D. Eisenhower regarding preservation of historical monuments in Europe, May 26, 1944 [Eisenhower's Pre-Presidential Papers, Principal File, Box 13, Bradley Omar N. (6); NAID #7505528 For a full listing of Eisenhower's statements between 1943 and 1951 that demonstrate how he gradually refined his understanding of the relationship between the military and the arts during combat, see [https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online.../monuments\\_men.html](https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online.../monuments_men.html) (accessed July 2017)

generations.” General Eisenhower accepted the award and spoke at length about how even a common soldier trained in the science of destruction appreciates creative ideals expressed in art. He stated how he personally saw his soldiers receive a renewed interest in art as they toured art centers of Europe and Asia and noted that “even a soldier must consciously appreciate the arts and protect them; [he saw] soldiers became ardent worshippers of life, beauty, peace.”<sup>82</sup>

These recollections suggest that Eisenhower and the troops had some level of aesthetic appreciation for the European monuments they were defending even if most of them did not have a background in art appreciation or they were not usually experiencing them under ideal conditions. It also reflects the commonly held belief that recognition of the high arts inculcated self-improvement and positive ideals for Americans during difficult times.

### **Assessing the Collaboration**

By strategically interfacing with the Allied Forces of the U.S. Army, the MFA&A officers accomplished incredible feats. Although they could not take credit for all the “saves” and restitutions made after World War II, they probably did the lion’s share of the work. The MFA&A officers managed to help war-torn communities partially recover their cultural identities by saving their arts. Because they worked through local labor and authorities in many parts of Europe they won admiration for America and its managerial expertise in conservation.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> General Eisenhower at the Met: The Monuments Men Foundation Discovers New Audio Recording of General Eisenhower, [www.monumentsmenfoundation.org/discoveries/eisenhower-at-the-met](http://www.monumentsmenfoundation.org/discoveries/eisenhower-at-the-met) (accessed 6-2-2017)

<sup>83</sup> Finley, 1944, 8.

At the end of the war, MFA&A officers uncovered hundreds of hidden Nazi repositories in remote places like Merkers, Menzengraben, Ellingen, Heilbronn, Grasleben, Altaussee, and Ransbach. Officers worked on restitution, and established central collecting points in Munich, Wiesbaden, Marburg and Offenbach where countries could make claims for stolen or damaged artworks. MFA&A officers were responsible for returning hallowed western treasures like Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus," Leonardo da Vinci's "Lady with an Ermine," Michelangelo's "Madonna and Child," Vermeer's "The Astronomer," Rembrandt's "The Night Watch," and the Ghent Altarpiece. In many cases, "the peoples of devastated regions were grateful for the salvage of their cultural patrimony."<sup>84</sup>

It is impossible to quantify exactly how much was accomplished and who should get credit, because the process of finding looted Nazi works is still ongoing. Many works are still hidden in private collections with their provenance clouded, erased, or fictionalized by the art market. Even today, museums all over the world need to be very careful about transparently establishing their rights to certain European artworks. A more useful question to consider is why the unusual alliance between museum professionals and the military during World War II was so effective.

Between 1943 and 1946 members of the Roberts Commission, the MFA&A, and the Army worked closely together. Under pressures of war, they were able to move quickly and adjust to changing situations. Assessments of high and low arts, or how the arts should be interpreted didn't really seem to matter. What did matter was that America was saving European art from destruction, plunder, and loss.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



Why did such an unusual alliance of arts professionals and military work well on so many levels? First, there were surprising compatibilities between museum and military bureaucracies; both held institutional resourcefulness as a corporate goal and had hierarchies of reporting. Coordination and teamwork, whether directed at creating exhibitions or army maneuvers, was something that both museums professionals and the Army shared. Working under stress and time constraints was also a common value. The practical urgencies of war worked to the advantage of efficiently applying emergency arts preservation and “expert first aid.”<sup>85</sup> The working styles of museums and military that valued such characteristics as pragmatism, order, and attention to detail, were in many ways logically compatible.<sup>86</sup>

A second reason why the Roberts Commission was so effective was because it was a temporary government agency not requiring the jurisdiction of Congress. Many of the Specialized Training Programs that Congress had grudgingly subsidized were soon considered extraneous and eliminated after one year, but the Roberts Commission and MFA&A Programs were maintained because they were inexpensive and cost effective.<sup>87</sup> Securely folded into either museum institutional resources or the army’s war budget, the expenses for these programs could be grandfathered in elsewhere. It was not necessary to appeal to Congress for successive funding.

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<sup>85</sup> David E. Finley, “Museum Men in the Theaters of Operations.” *The Museum News*, XXII, no. 9 (November 4, 1944), 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Carr Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles: The Discovery and Restitution of Looted European Art 1946* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946).

<sup>87</sup> Louis Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes: The Story of the Army Specialized Training Program in World War II*. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Col, 1988), 269.

Finally, saving the arts was good for public relations and a welcome and morale-elevating task for soldiers working in the trenches, especially compared to the usual drudgery and destruction of war.<sup>88</sup> Soldiers were curious about the foreign countries they were occupying. Protecting famed historic monuments and artworks in Europe that most Americans would never have the chance to see was something exciting to write home about. General Eisenhower made it a policy to return at once to each of the countries overrun by the Germans at least one outstanding work of art.<sup>89</sup> These token restitutions, made at the expense of the United States government, “symbolized American policy...reaffirm our intentions to right the wrongs of Nazi oppression and are an earnest expression of American good will.”<sup>90</sup>

MFA&A officers rescued detailed German records and conserved museum archives that were useful in determining the original ownership of artworks. Officers were charged with thinking about the complex problem of restitution and devising an appropriate procedure for it to legally happen. They eventually returned works of art to claimant nations and to art representatives for each country that were properly qualified.<sup>91</sup> Military Government Law No. 52 defined Allied policy on the restitution of cultural objects in war areas.<sup>92</sup>

MFA&A officers were used to thinking on their feet and devising resourceful solutions to a given situation. They might need to scavenge lights from wrecked jeeps and

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<sup>88</sup> Walker Hancock, “Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany” *College Art Journal* 5, no. 4 (May, 1946): 271-311.

<sup>89</sup> Howe, Jr., 1946, 243.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>92</sup> Walter I Farmer. *The Safekeepers: A Memoir of the Arts at the End of World War II* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 38.

repurpose them to light buildings or rehire former members of the museum staff to assist with rescues. Sometimes they felt it incumbent to feed local people or help them find their families. They weren't just preparing to handle works of art or assess damage; in addition to documenting complaints and recording losses, they often had to help the people. Many times this became a kind of personal crusade and perhaps even an opportunity to launch their own careers after the war.<sup>93</sup>

The Office of the Military Government U.S. (OMGUS) was the U.S. military program for rejuvenating culture in the American-occupied quarter of Berlin after World War II. A small group of cultural officers tried to establish connections with German modern artists to further German-American relations and stimulate the reintroduction of modern art and democracy. Much of this work had to be covert because the U.S. government could be accused of propaganda.<sup>94</sup>

During the restitution period, many MFA&A officers felt it was important to create impromptu exhibitions of recovered artworks, to build local morale, encourage de-Nazification, and show destroyed towns that their beloved patrimony was safe, thanks to the U.S. armed forces.<sup>95</sup> MFA&A officers worked to assemble small exhibitions of beloved treasures to impress visiting dignitaries.<sup>96</sup> Sometimes the proceeds of the exhibition, after

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-56.

<sup>94</sup> See Cora S. Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009),

<sup>95</sup> De-Nazification was an Allied initiative to purge all elements of Nazism from localities that had undergone Nazi influence. It was carried out especially between 1945 and 1948. Small exhibitions of arts were a useful strategy to rejuvenate and democratize culture. The Office of Military Government (OMGUS) put aside funds specifically for this purpose. *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>96</sup> *Exhibition of Masterpieces of Sienese Art Under the Patronage of Field Marshal the Honorable Sir Harold R.L.G. Alexander, Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre; Organized under the Supervision of MFA&A Toscana Region, December 18, 1944.* Box 14, Houghton Library MS Storage, 135, Francis Henry Taylor Collection. Harvard University.

expenses were met, were used to form a fund to be used in furthering the restoration of national monuments.<sup>97</sup> Such exhibitions could be symbolic demonstrations of peace: "Let us by this first exhibition of Old Masters rededicate this place both artistically and morally. Let this be the beginning of a peace which will not only bring understanding among the nations but which will also give due honor and protection both to historical monuments and to a free, living art."<sup>98</sup>

Exhibitions could also mark political alliances or reconciliations.<sup>99</sup> "This exhibition marks the return to Vienna of its most celebrated masterpieces...With the advance of the American armies [they] came under the control and protection of the United States Forces...Through the intervention of the American armies these recovered and returned to safety."<sup>100</sup> In this exhibition catalogue MFA&A officer Perry Cott was thanked, "who, for months in advance laid the plans for the exhibition and who offered experience as museum expert in putting the plans into execution."<sup>101</sup>

While some MFA&A officers remained in Europe working on repatriation, others completed their service and returned home to previous curatorial or administrative positions in art museums. They had been changed by their war experiences, seen more of the world, and wished to exert a more experienced kind of leadership. Thirty-eight of the

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<sup>97</sup> Dr. Ernst Holzinger, Director of the Staedelsche Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt and Captain Walter I. Farmer *Exhibition of German Owned Old Masters, Wiesbaden Collecting Point*. Box 14, Houghton Library MS Storage, 135, Francis Henry Taylor Collection, Harvard University.

<sup>98</sup> *Exhibition of Bavarian Paintings of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. In the west wing of the Haus der Kunst, Prinzregentenstrasse 1, Munich, Bavarian State Galleries, 1946. Under the Auspices of Military Government for Bavaria, MFA&A. MS Storage, 135, Francis Henry Taylor Collection.

<sup>99</sup> Edith Appleton Standen and Otto J. Brendel, "Report on Germany" *College Art Journal* 7, no. 3 (Spring, 1948): 209-215.

<sup>100</sup> *Exhibition of Masterpieces from the Picture Gallery of the Museum of Art History in Hofburg*. (Vienna: The Museum of Art History in Vienna, December 19, 1945). MFA&A. MS Storage, 135, Francis Henry Taylor Collection. Houghton Library. Harvard University.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

officers returned to more influential positions, often in their home museums, even leading them as directors, board members, or chief curators. Their war experiences influenced early Cold War museum programs, exhibitions, collections, and institutional missions, pushing post-war museums towards greater acceptances of cultural differences and the foreign. Concern for the technical care of cultural heritage as resourceful treatments, packing, or storage methods received greater attention from the war among technicians. Increased funds for conservation in American museums were not immediately available since there were few well-established rules or principals for the conservation profession and funding for museum programs in conservation was limited.<sup>102</sup>

Many MFA&A officers came home to preferential treatment at influential museums like the MoMA, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Acting female directors and curators who had held their jobs during the war deferred to their seniority and rotated back to lesser positions. Museum men with war experience had a certain cachet, having served the country and saved European arts. They could now reassume climbing the ranks of American museum structures.<sup>103</sup> Their European experiences gave them a more

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<sup>102</sup> See Joyce Hill Stoner, "Changing Approaches in Art Conservation: 1925 to the Present" in *Scientific Examination of Art: Modern Techniques in Conservation and Analysis*. Sackler NAS Colloquium. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (Washington D.C., National Academy of Sciences, Press,) 2003, 41 and Francesca G. Bewer, *A Laboratory for Art: Harvard's Fogg Museum and the Emergence of Conservation in America 1900-1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Harvard Art Museum, 2010) 211-256.

<sup>103</sup> At the MoMA, Andrew Richie became Curator of Painting, Peter Blake became Curator of Architecture, and Porter McCray, who had worked closely with Nelson Rockefeller, was given the position of Curator of Exhibitions. Sheldon Keck was made Conservator James Rorimer and Theodore Rousseau became Curators. Edith Appleton Standen, the sole female MFA&A officer, became Curator of Textiles at the Met. The NGA employed Percy Cott who had first returned to the Worcester Art Museum as Director, but subsequently accepted the more important position of Chief Curator at NGA. James Rorimer later became Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Charles Seymour became NGA Curator of Sculpture. The Fogg Art Museum re-employed George Stout as Conservator and Langdon Warner as Curator of Oriental Art. Theodore Sizer became Director of Yale Art Museum. Yale Art Museum hired Charles Henry Sawyer and Lamont Moore as curators. Princeton Art Museum hired Earnest T. DeWald as Director. Horace H.F. Jayne became Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Thomas Carr Howe returned to the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco. Lesley Cheek became Director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Perry Rathbone became

determined view of the importance of American art museums as stewards of world art. They were more interested in exhibiting and interpreting the arts of foreign countries and using the arts to convey international good will. Their guidance influenced the direction of U.S. museum exhibitions and programs throughout the Cold War. The war experience of returning MFA&A officers gave art museums a heightened respect and credibility in the eyes of certain federal officials. Major U.S. art museums had gained a new independence and confidence in their unique goals and abilities. Through the positive actions of the MFA&A officers and other critical wartime activities, the U.S. had been able to demonstrate to itself and other nations that it had the sophistication, power, and discernment to identify and protect great European art and Western Civilization.

### **Changing Relationships at the End of War**

In the aftermath of World War II, the symbiotic relationship between the federal government and art museums gradually loosened. For the government's purposes America's long-standing arts identity problem could be resolved in other media directions such as music, particularly jazz, or theatre as well as in visual arts. The government disbanded temporary war agencies and redistributed their cultural responsibilities. Art museums returned to peacetime agendas and did this with a new sense of confidence and independence. In the process they assumed a stronger place in American society, initiated

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Director of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Charles P. Parkhurst became Director of the Albright Knox Museum in Rochester. Beaumont Newhall became director of the George Eastman House in Rochester New York. Walter Farmer became President of the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston. Harry Grier became Assistant Director at Minneapolis Institute of the Arts and later became Director of the Frick Collection. LaMont Moore became Associate Director of the American Academy in Rome and Yale University. Walker Hancock became head of sculpture at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art.

their own international projects, and served as art representatives for the nation, strengthening America's world status and expertise in the arts.

"Berlin Paintings" was a major disagreement that developed at the end of the war between certain MFA&A officers, the State Department, and the executive branch of the government that expanded into a public controversy. In December 1945, by presidential decree, two hundred and two of the highest quality and most fragile paintings from the American sector of Berlin were transported from the American sector of Berlin to the United States "for safe keeping" by the Department of the Army, when it was asserted that they could not be adequately protected during reconstruction. The paintings were stored at the National Gallery in spite of furious opposition from some MFA&A officers and certain U.S. museum directors and art authorities who insisted that the paintings had not been in danger and demanded their immediate return to Germany.<sup>104</sup>

The NGA chose to keep the works in storage, hoping to quell the controversy, and two years later, at the request of the Department of the Army and the Senate Armed Services Committee, put the works on public exhibition.<sup>105</sup> The exhibition received great national attention and spurred a second public controversy regarding when the paintings should be returned to Germany. There was a standoff between Senator J. William Fulbright (D Alabama) who was aligned with major American art museums versus the Department of State and the

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<sup>104</sup> Those protesting the removal mistrusted the government and claimed that protective custody was simply a pretext for taking the paintings "like war booty." They further claimed that the facilities at Wiesbaden did provide adequate care for the paintings and that it was detrimental to move them since many were too fragile.

<sup>105</sup> Virtually all of the paintings, examples of Flemish, Dutch, German, French, English, and Italian Schools, were from the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, The American Third Army had found in April 1945, along with one hundred tons of Reichsbank gold when it captured the Kaiserroda Works at Merkers in Thuringia. The artworks had been stored in salt mines 2,100 feet underground for protection from Allied bombing of Berlin.

U.S. Army. The Fulbright-museums position insisted on retaining the paintings for one more year to exhibit them broadly in the United States. The position of the Department of State and the Army was to return the paintings to Berlin as soon as possible.<sup>106</sup> After lengthy Senate hearings in which many museum and arts representatives testified, there was a yearlong extension of these “loans” and a traveling exhibition of them to twelve celebrated U.S. cities between 1948-9.<sup>107</sup> Although the exhibition was co-managed by representatives of the Army and the NGA, American art museums had won an important fight and asserted a new independence, affirming their cultural interest to make the arts accessible to a broad public over government concerns to return the arts for political reasons.

The government continued to see American arts and culture as inducements for democracy to promote the growing arts policies of the State Department and the CIA and there were other changes that caused a separation between the interests of art museums and federal government after the war ended. The State Department did not renew its grant support for the Latin American Office inside NGA. Instead, it directed its own post-war exhibition exhibitions to utilize the arts as a tool for democratic propaganda.<sup>108</sup> The State

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<sup>106</sup> See *Hearings Before A Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate: S. 2439: A Bill to Provide for the Temporary Retention in the United States of Certain German Paintings* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 16, 1948), 1-89. Fulbright was an up-and-coming senator and a southern Democrat, who founded the Fulbright Cultural Exchange Program in 1946.

<sup>107</sup> “Berlin Paintings” traveled to the Met, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Chicago Art Institute, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Detroit Institute of Arts, Cleveland Museum of Art, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, L.A. County Museum of History, Science and Art, City Art Museum of St. Louis, Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and Toledo Museum of Art.

<sup>108</sup> Michael L. Krenn, *Fall-out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 9-49. Krenn provides an analysis of the failed State Department exhibition “Advancing American Art.” For other sources on this exhibition see Frank Ninkovich, “The Currents of Cultural Diplomacy: Art and the State Department 1938-1947” *Diplomatic History* 1 [Summer 1977], 215-37 and Taylor D. Littleton and Maltby Sykes, *Advancing American Art Painting, Politics, and Cultural Confrontation at Mid-Century* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1989).



Department no longer concentrated on influencing culture in Latin America and instead focused on affecting culture in Europe. It also continued to actively create its own American trade shows for Europe.<sup>109</sup> This policy was in keeping with Truman's Marshall Plan or European Aid Program (1948-52) that redirected American aid from Latin America to European countries if they rejected communism.<sup>110</sup>

After 1947, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) became interested in conducting pro-democratic cultural activities to sway communist-leaning leaders and intellectuals in France and bring them around to the U.S. government's way of thinking.<sup>111</sup> The CIA worked covertly through MoMA and a front organization called the Congress of Cultural Freedom so that the government would not be accused of manipulating the arts. It used scholarly conferences and exhibitions of American Abstract Expressionism to promote democracy, simplistically pointing out how the style of the paintings visually expressed values of Western freedom.<sup>112</sup>

On an international level, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), an adjunct of UNESCO, was created to promote the circulation of art exhibitions throughout world museums and advance understanding of world cultures and arts conservation.<sup>113</sup> ICOM invited U.S. expert Elodie Courter Osborne, who had for years run MoMA's Department of Circulating Exhibitions, to write *A Manual of Travelling Exhibitions* to advise other nations

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<sup>109</sup> For a description of U.S. trade shows, see Masey and Morgan, 2008.

<sup>110</sup> The Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe after World War II continued notions of Dollar Diplomacy and OCIAA philosophies combining political, economic, and cultural incentives.

<sup>111</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York, The New Press, 2013).

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, also see Cockcraft, 1974; Guilbaut, 1983.

<sup>113</sup> ICOM was founded in 1947, as a branch of UNESCO, The founder and first president of ICOM was an American named Chauncy Hamlin, who had formerly been president of AAM.

and promote the international exchange of exhibitions to serve in interpreting one people to another.<sup>114</sup> This international publication was a practical guide or “how-to” manual with extended text and illustrations on the subjects of how to schedule exhibitions, assemble and display “packaged shows” of different kinds of media, handle fragile works of art, and pack artworks for touring with suggested methods of transport and insurance. It also underlined American expertise in art handling and traveling exhibitions, further enhancing U.S. world leadership in the arts.

The roles art museums played during the war years had laid the foundation for their more active participation in “soft power” after the war.<sup>115</sup> A series of major European art exhibitions on U.S. soil were sponsored by NGA and MoMA between 1945-1957 concentrating on the arts of select European nations.<sup>116</sup> These featured the “rescued” masterworks of Vienna, Italy, Holland, and Berlin and celebrated the valiant efforts of America’s armed forces.<sup>117</sup> With the exception of “Michelangelo’s David,” all exhibitions circulated to major cities in the United States and had wide attendance. During the 1950’s, MoMA and NGA both developed a cluster of exhibitions focused on Japanese and Korean art to improve

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<sup>114</sup> Elodie Courter Osborne, *A Manual of Travelling Exhibitions* (UNESCO Paris: Imprimerie Union, 1953). “Packaged shows” are those that arrive with their own installation units ready to set up, labels properly attached and component parts easily removable from packing cases requiring a minimum of effort from the host museums,

<sup>115</sup> Joseph Nye’s concept of “soft power” or the political ability to influence other nations to want a desired outcome through friendly inducements or flattery rather than force or coercion can be applied to cultural art exhibitions. See Joseph Nye, *The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004) or Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

<sup>116</sup> “Paintings Looted From Holland and Returned Through the Efforts of the United States Armed Forces” (1947), “French Tapestries” (1947), “Paintings from the Berlin Museums” (1948), Art Treasures from the Vienna Collections (1949), “Michelangelo’s David (1949), “Twentieth Century Italian Art” (1949), “De David a Toulouse Lautrec: French Masterpieces in U.S. Collections” (1955), and “Dutch Paintings of the Golden Age (1954) and “German Art of the Twentieth Century” (1957).

<sup>117</sup> “Fine Arts Under Fire” (1946) was an exhibition of photographs developed by the editors of *Life* magazine in collaboration with the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments.

diplomatic relations with formerly Axis countries.<sup>118</sup> In the coming decades American art museums proactively investigated new areas of international arts scholarship, often partnering with other museums, and took the initiative to develop their own international exhibitions. American art museums had won a political place for themselves in brokering special exhibitions of international art and representing the United States in the eyes of foreign governments.

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<sup>118</sup> The MoMA developed “Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs” (1951); “Japanese Household Objects” (1951); “Japanese Pottery” (1954); “Japanese Calligraphy” (19154); and “Japanese Exhibition House” (1955). The NGA developed “Japanese Painting and Sculpture from the Sixth Century AD to the Nineteenth Century (1953); “Masterpieces of Korean Art” (1957) and “Haniwa: Japanese Burial Mound Figures” (1960).

## Summary and Conclusions

World War II was very good for U.S. art museums. It did many things to improve the relations between the federal government and the arts. It brought art museums and key branches of the government together to utilize the arts and deploy exhibitions for national use. Working on national and international levels, NGA and MoMA focused on white Americans adapting to standards set by East Coast elites. Representations pictured a particular type of unity and confidence for America and created new types of subjective exhibitions to bolster national morale and reinforce the war effort. In addition to producing exhibitions, museum professionals shared expertise and worked with Army brigades in war zones to identify and protect key monuments of Western art and civilization, earning America increased cultural status as a superpower. The roles NGA and MoMA played during the war years laid the foundation for more active deployment of national diplomacy exhibitions after the war and elevated the socio-political influence of American art museums.

World War II forced the U.S. government to take a stand on the arts and admit that the arts were important to the nation. It encouraged art museums to make themselves more useful to society and gave them a major role in using the arts to interpret American life and explicate foreign cultures. It demonstrated the political power of exhibitions and upgraded the international arts identity of America. The war also gave art museums a new social consciousness and developed their skills in communicating with public officials and co-organizing with one another to maximize institutional strength and visibility. The war increased art expertise and museum specialties in packing, preserving, or conserving various types of artworks.

There is, of course, another side to these years that could also be argued. During wartime art museums also became bastions of nationalism and solace for white mainstream audiences. Their exhibitions provided unity for dominant culture bearers during wartime by reflecting an idealized American society in which undercurrents of inequality, exclusion, or prejudice were suppressed. In the coming decades with increased motivation to justify their social importance, expand their audiences, and serve more diverse communities, art museums would need to rethink mainstream positions on the arts, allow room for more diverse voices, and make space for other “imagined communities.” Wartime interest in the arts had opened the door, made art museums more socially responsible, and created opportunities to make arts and culture available to more Americans in the future. But how the arts interfaced with political issues or racial problems was never fully resolved.

The heightened social importance of the arts that resulted from World War II eventually led to the creation of two permanent federal arts agencies in 1965. Although immediately after the war the federal government was less interested in actively utilizing art museums for national purposes, it still needed to take a position on the arts and humanities. Many Americans felt more comfortable with the arts, public opinion became increasingly important in influencing government policy, and art museums could both foster or reveal public opinion.

In 1965, in order to emphasize the continued importance of arts and culture to the nation, Congress passed CITE PL 89-209, a Bill that created the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities. Its provisions provided the means “to educate Americans and encourage creativity and scholarship that fosters a mutual respect for diverse beliefs and values of all

persons and groups.”<sup>1</sup> Grants were awarded for projects exhibiting artistic excellence; funds were available for research, education, preservation, and public programs in the arts and humanities, although more conservative members of Congress would question government support of arts projects in years to come.

The Bill created two new agencies -- the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)—that established a framework within which art museums and government could interact.<sup>2</sup> This structure allowed the government to exert a greater measure of control over U.S. art museums by regulating guidelines for federal grant support that indicated how museums should approach the arts if they wished to have the financing of American taxpayers and the prestige of a federal granting agency attached to their projects.

Ten years later Congress provided further encouragement by passing the “Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Program” that provided insurance coverage from the government to minimize the costs of insuring costly international loans that might otherwise be prohibitive.<sup>3</sup> The NEA and NEH exhibitions programs available to museums to obtain grants were a major field of government sponsorship that, if awarded, could help support indemnities for foreign artworks, a huge portion of exhibition budgets. Grants also covered other exhibition planning and implementation expenses. In 2007 Congress expanded eligibility under the indemnity

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<sup>1</sup> “Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Program: International Indemnity/NEA.” <https://www.arts.gov/artistic-fields/museums/arts-and-artifacts-indemnity> (Accessed October 2018).

<sup>2</sup> The term humanities emphasizes art and culture in society.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

program to include coverage for works of art owned by U.S. entities that are shown in national exhibitions while such artworks are on exhibition in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

While it is not possible to conclude that government interest in the arts and art museums would never have happened without the advent of World War II, it is certainly legitimate to claim that the cultural experiences, relationships, and discourse that developed around the arts during World War II helped bolster the relationship between government and art museums, heighten America's international art image, and bring art museums into closer proximity with social issues. The interactions between the federal government and U.S. art museums during this period changed the stature of American art museums and helped them develop a stronger socio-political platform from which to represent the arts. Exhibitions were their best tool to explore social needs and changes even if assumptions about art as a technology of diplomacy and national unity were still premised on exclusionary ideas. World War II helped lay the groundwork for art museums and their exhibitions to present a point of view and play more integral social roles for some subsets of people. However, in attempting to take a moderate position or aim for the center on certain hot-button issues, as they were so inclined to do, museums could become more vulnerable to criticism from both sides of the political spectrum.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix I: MoMA War-Themed Exhibitions 1941-1945

- 1941 Britain at War (May 22-Sept. 2)  
1941 National Defense Poster Competition (July 16- September 7)  
1941 Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Deployment Unit (October 10-April 1)  
1941 Image of Freedom (October 29-February 2)  
1941 War Comes to the People: A Story Written with the Lens (December 10- January 5)
- 1942 US Army Illustrators of Fort Custer Michigan (February 4-March 10)  
1942 Photographs of the Civil War and the American Frontier (March 3- April 5)  
1942 Two Years of War in England: Photographs by William Vandivert (April 15- June 10)  
1942 Wartime Housing (April 22-June 21)  
1942 Art Sale for the Armed Services (May 6-June 16)  
1942 Road to Victory (May 21-October 4)  
1942 Camouflage for Civilian Defense (August 12- September 13)  
1942 The Americas Co-operate (September 30-October 18)  
1942 United Hemisphere Poster Competition (October 21-November 24)  
1942 The Museum and the War (October 23-January 22)  
1942 Art from Fighting China (November 11-27)  
1942 Children's Painting and the War (November 18- December 13)  
1942 National War Poster Competition (November 25-January 3)  
1942 Useful Objects in Wartime under \$10 (December 2- January 9)
- 1943 Art Education in Wartime (January 27- February 22)  
1943 The Arts in Therapy (February 3-March 7)  
1943 Yank Illustrates the War (March 17- April 18)  
1943 War Caricatures by Hoffmeister and Peel (May 12- June 13)  
1943 Occupational Therapy: Its Function and Purpose ( June 2- October 17)  
1943 Tunisian Triumph: War Photographs by Eliot Elisofon ( June 14- July 24)  
1943 Airways to Peace (July 2-October 31)  
1943 Guernica (July 26 and continuing)  
1943 Art Shows for USO Centers (August 4-September 26)  
1943 Bali, Background for War: The Human Problem of Reoccupation (August 11-September 19)  
1943 Magazine Cover Competition: Women in Necessary Civilian Employment (September 3- 28)  
1943 Marines Under Fire (November 10-January 9)



- 1944 Norman Bel Geddes War Maneuver Models (January 26- March 5)
- 1944 Chinese Children War Pictures (April 5-May 4)
- 1944 Pacific Report: Photos by Eugene Smith (May 10- June 30)
- 1944 American Battle Painting 1776-1918 (September 26- November 12)
- 1944 Manzaanar: Photographs by Ansel Adams of Loyal Japanese-American Relocation Center (November 10- December 24)
- 1944 The War Years: Color Reproductions of Works by Picasso, Matisse, Bonnard 1939-1943 (November 14-27)
  
- 1945 Power in the Pacific: Battle Photographs of our Navy in Action on the Sea and in the Sky (January 23- March 20)
- 1945 Art for War Veterans (September 26-November 25)
- The Lesson of War Housing (January 16-March 4)
- Art for War Veterans (September 26-November 25)

\* Picasso stipulated that his masterpiece *Guernica* be placed under MoMA's care from 1939 throughout the War while it circulated the United States in order to raise funds for Spanish refugees during the War. It toured museums in the US from 1939-1952.

## Appendix II: NGA War-Themed Exhibitions 1941-1945

- 1941 Great Fire of London 1940 (July 18-August 10, 1941)
- 1942 American Artists' Record of War and Defense (Feb 7-March 8, 1942)
- 1942 Soldiers of Production (March 17-April 15, 1942)
- 1942 Paintings, Posters...Activities of the Red Cross (May 2-30)
- 1942 Presidents of the South American Republics (June 27-July 19)
- 1942 An Exhibition by Men of the Armed Forces (July 5-August 2, 1942)
  
- 1943 War Posters (January 17-Feb 18, 1943)
- 1943 War Art (June 20-Aug 1, 1943)
- 1943 Marine Watercolors and Drawings (September 12-October 10, 1943)
- 1943 Art for Bonds (Sept 12-October 10, 1943)
- 1943 Navajo Pollen and Sandpainting (October 17-November 18)
- 1943 Paintings of Naval Aviation by American Artists (Nov 21 – Dec 12, 1943)
  
- 1944 The Army at War (February 20- March 19, 1944)
- 1944 British War Paintings (April 23- May 20, 1944)
- 1944 American Battle Painting 1776-1918 (July 4- September 4, 1944)
- 1944 Paintings of Naval Medicine (Sept 10- Oct 8, 1944)
- 1944 Paintings and Drawings of the United States Coast Guard (September 17- October 8)
- 1944 Wartime Paintings of the Army Air Forces (October 15-November 12, 1944)
  
- 1945 The War Against Japan (May 27- June 19, 1945)
- 1945 Marine Corps Battle Art (November 10- December 16, 1945)
- 1945 Men of Action of the Naval Services, World War II (November 23- December 14, 1947)
- 1945 Soldier Art (July 4- September 4, 1945)
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