

A
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of
Modern
Art

at Washington University in St. Louis

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Director

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Editor

With essays by contributing authors

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Fig. 1. Anonymous
The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Louis, Missouri, 1881
Wood engraving, 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Published in *Harper's Weekly* (June 25, 1881): 414
Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis
Gift of Gerald D. Bolas, 1986



Fig. 2. Entrance hall of the St. Louis School and
Museum of Fine Arts with Harriet Hosmer's *Oenone*
(c. 1854-55) in 1881.
Archives of The Saint Louis Art Museum



A Gallery of Modern Art at Washington University in St. Louis

At the inauguration of Washington University's "new gallery of modern art" in 1946, curator Horst W. Janson unveiled his purchases and proudly announced the "finest collection of contemporary art assembled on any American campus." During the previous year, Janson had acquired 38 artworks that embodied his conception of modern art, introducing twentieth-century artistic trends to the central United States. Janson believed that his "duty" as an art educator was to fulfill his role of "intellectual leadership" in assembling an art collection that would serve the educational needs of both the academic and regional communities. Despite the fact that the University Chancellor, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Arthur Holly Compton, confessed in his opening remarks that he could not understand modern art, Janson believed that his acquisitions "represent a new and important step in the growth of the Washington University Art Collection."¹

Indeed, Janson's bold statement on modern art did "represent a new and important step" introducing the advances of Cubism, German Expressionism, and Surrealism to this region and helping to motivate a generation of collectors and collections. From an historical perspective, Janson's seminal acquisitions marked a climactic mid-point in the evolution of Washington University's art collections. Nevertheless, his desire "to reshape [the art collection's] character . . . in accordance with the educational needs of today" conformed to the University's educational mission and collecting tradition from its founding in 1853, through the establishment of its first museum in 1881, and continuing beyond the rededication of the University museum as the Gallery of Art in 1960.² The curatorial vision to acquire and exhibit the art of the time characterizes the nearly 150 years of collecting art at Washington University.

In the first decades after the State of Missouri chartered the Eliot Seminary (later Washington University) in 1853, the University's founders actively patronized living artists whose work realized the University's educational mission. For example, Wayman Crow (fig. 3), author of Washington University's charter, founding board member, and benefactor, sponsored the neoclassical sculptor Harriet Hosmer. As a token of her appreciation the sculptor offered Crow, as a "love gift," her first original marble from Rome, *Daphne* (1854). Crow enthusiastically responded by commissioning Hosmer's first monumental marble, *Oenone* (1854-5).³ These marbles formally entered the University collections over the subsequent decades, beginning in 1868. By thus patronizing the work of a promising local sculptor, Crow evinced his civic philanthropy and demonstrated remarkable enlightenment in sponsoring a woman artist during the antebellum era in the traditionally male field of marble sculpting.

Founding chancellor William Greenleaf Eliot (fig. 4) demonstrated his leadership in art patronage through his role in commissioning Thomas Ball's *Freedom's Memorial* (1875) in commemoration of Lincoln's emancipation proclamation. Eliot visited Thomas Ball's Florentine studio during a tour of Europe in the summer of 1869, where he saw the sculptor's plaster model of the memorial. As a member of the Western Sanitary Commission charged with erecting the monument on behalf of African-Americans, Eliot recommended the commission of Ball's figure group for a bronze, which was subsequently

dedicated in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C. in 1876. At the same time he commissioned a marble copy of the original plaster for Washington University.⁴

Chancellor Eliot's and Wayman Crow's prescience in the visual arts culminated in the creation of the first public art museum west of the Mississippi River, the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts, a department of Washington University, dedicated on May 10, 1881. Crow sponsored the Italian villa-styled building (fig. 1), designed by the Boston architectural firm Peabody and Stearns, as a memorial to his recently deceased son, Wayman, Jr. In his inaugural remarks Crow articulated his ambitions for the new museum "to educate the public taste, instil [sic] sound principles of aesthetic culture and foster a distinctively American type of art." In its architecture, collections, and programs the institution embodied what Chancellor Eliot envisioned for the University's first art museum—"a conservatory of art, a treasure-house of beauty, the historical record of all that the past has accomplished; promoter and creator of greater things to come." The national and international press as well as the St. Louis public recognized the significance of this new western cultural institution as launching "one of the most important epochs in the history of St. Louis."⁵

To fulfill its ambitious aims the University selected the dynamic young designer, Halsey C. Ives, to direct the School and Museum. Ives' vision of art education, formulated during his years of study at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), London, shaped the school's program of instruction and the museum's collections. Ives intended to integrate art education into society to improve the quality of the crafts, trades, and industry in the region. His program focused on the interrelationship of fine arts, design, and crafts through rigorous technical instruction and by exhibiting examples of great art and design throughout western history.

For the inauguration of the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts in the Crow Memorial building, Ives mounted the most ambitious art exhibition to date in the west, embodying the educational mission of the University and the collecting tastes of the regional arts patrons. Ives exhibited his purchases of some 300 plaster casts and bronze replicas of the great art historical monuments of near eastern and western civilization, a collection described as "superior to any in America"⁶ (fig. 2). In addition, an extensive loan exhibition from prominent local private collections filled the upper galleries, testifying to the prevailing interest in contemporary European and American art. Of the 143 paintings on exhibit, almost three-quarters were created by living artists, principally from France and Germany. A number of lenders to this exhibition eventually donated their paintings, including Gustave Brion's *Invasion* (1867) and Frederic E. Church's *Twilight* (1865), to the University. Recognizing this rare opportunity to see modern art, the press reported that the new museum's exhibition presented works by "artists of high repute, [which] together afford the means of study of much of the best of modern art."⁷

For three decades Ives was the central cultural figure in the region, and catalyzed the movement toward acquiring modern art. Ives

dedicated his summers to touring the galleries and salons of Europe, purchasing artworks and becoming intimately familiar with the artistic milieu in Paris and London. On these tours, Ives befriended numerous European artists, including Jules Breton, Julien Dupré, and Leon Lhermitte, and purchased or commissioned their artworks directly for the museum as well as encouraging purchases by such patrons as Charles Parsons. His friendship with Julien Dupré resulted in the commission for *Haying Scene* (1882, fig. 5), perhaps the most popular painting in the museum at this time, and the purchase, by popular subscription in 1886, of *In Pasture* (1882). Ives also promoted such American artists as William M. Chase, acquiring his largest European painting, *Courtyard of a Dutch Orphan Asylum* (c. 1884), again by popular subscription in 1885.⁸

Ives' regional preeminence in cultural affairs resulted in his selection as chairman of the Art Department for the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. While organizing the international exhibition Ives included objects which he coveted for the St. Louis School and Museum. In March 1894 the St. Louis Museum exhibited 183 artworks that he acquired from the Columbian Exposition, featuring the first place medal-winning painting, *¡Otra Margarita!* (1892) by Joaquín Sorolla, and 143 plaster casts, bronze replicas, and Danish book bindings that exemplified his art education philosophy.⁹ In the brief span of a decade, the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts, under the leadership of Ives, had established a position of "intellectual leadership" in art and education that influenced the entire region.

By the last decade of the century both the University and the museum had outgrown their downtown St. Louis campus. The University purchased land on the edge of the city, next to Forest Park, in 1894 and devised a masterplan to build a new, expanded campus. At the same time, the progressive City Council endorsed the creation of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company to organize a world's fair for St. Louis and erect a new building in Forest Park to house the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts. Naturally, the Exposition Company selected Ives as Chief of the Art Department to orchestrate an international art exhibition in the newly constructed Palace of Fine Arts, designed by Cass Gilbert (fig. 6). Perhaps the single most significant event in the cultural history of St. Louis, the World's Fair motivated a tremendous resurgence in the arts in St. Louis.

Following the highly successful 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the University moved its collections into the Palace of Fine Arts, rededicated as the St. Louis Museum of Fine Arts. A populace institution from its founding, the St. Louis Museum of Fine Arts opened on August 13, 1906 with an overwhelming public response. Within months the museum reported a remarkable record attendance of 6,000 on a sunny October afternoon. Both the working and wealthy classes of the city rallied behind their new museum with their attendance and generous gifts. In 1905, after the fair, local banker, art collector, and Museum benefactor Charles Parsons died and bequeathed to the Museum his entire collection. Parsons had amassed a substantial collection of Oriental porcelains, applied arts, and Victorian bric-a-brac during his world travels. Yet, Parsons' acute artistic sensibilities are best preserved in his collection of paintings. Over forty years Parsons had acquired a

significant group of British portraits, French Barbizon and academic paintings, and American landscapes—a collection that represents the artistic tastes of the principal patrons in St. Louis and across the nation during the late nineteenth century. Through his acquisitions and a fund established in his name, Charles Parsons provided the foundation of the University's painting collections, including numerous pieces selected for this catalog—Honoré Daumier's *Le Dessinateur*; Jules Breton's *Wine Shop-Monday*; Jean Baptiste Camille Corot's *Le Chemin des Vieux*; and Frederic E. Church's *Sierra Nevada de Santa Maria*.¹⁰

Commencing with its opening, the St. Louis Museum of Fine Arts organized a continuous series of exhibitions featuring contemporary German, French, Norwegian, and American artists. From these exhibitions Ives purchased artworks for the collection, including modern European paintings by Leon Lhermitte (*La Moisson*, 1883) and Puvis de Chavannes (*Charité*, 1904). In realization of Crow's inaugural dream to "foster a distinctively American type of art" and Ives' ambition to create an "American art museum," local arts patron William K. Bixby endowed the museum in 1906 with a fund for the purchase of American paintings. Ives utilized the Bixby Fund to acquire a number of important modern American paintings, including Thomas W. Dewing's *Brocart de Venise* (c. 1905), Frederick Childe Hassam's *Diamond Cove, Isles of Shoals* (1908), George Inness' *Storm on the Delaware* (1891), and Dwight Tryon's *Sunrise* (1906–07), which introduced St. Louis to the recent developments of Tonalist and Impressionist painting.¹¹

Due to the tremendous public response, the new University museum could proudly proclaim, "The importance of the Museum as a civic attraction in the new St. Louis may be regarded as established." After its first successful season, Ives and the Board of Control of the Museum launched a campaign to pass a tax proposition in support of the Museum. In its massive lobbying effort the Museum appealed to the public's nationalist sentiments by articulating its mission to serve "all branches of constructive effort" and to "aid in implanting a national artistic consciousness—a national motive or inspiration in art and an American art message for the world." The proposition passed convincingly in 1907, resulting in the establishment of the first municipally supported art museum in the United States. However, the city refused to release the tax levy to Washington University which, as a private institution, could not, according to the state constitution, administer public funds. After two years of negotiation between University and municipal officials, the St. Louis Museum of Fine Arts dissolved as a department of Washington University and became, in 1909, the City Art Museum, with Ives as its director. The University agreed to lend its collections to the city and the two institutions co-existed for over fifty years in a unique cooperative relationship.¹²

Over the next twenty years the City Art Museum expanded exponentially, building a major art collection held in the public trust. During this period the University continued to acquire artworks,

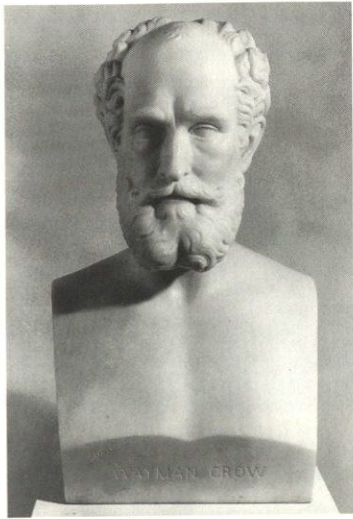


Fig. 3. Harriet Hosmer
Portrait of Wayman Crow, Sr., 1866
 Carrara marble, 24 x 13½ x 10¾"
 Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis
 Gift of the heirs of Wayman Crow, Sr., 1868

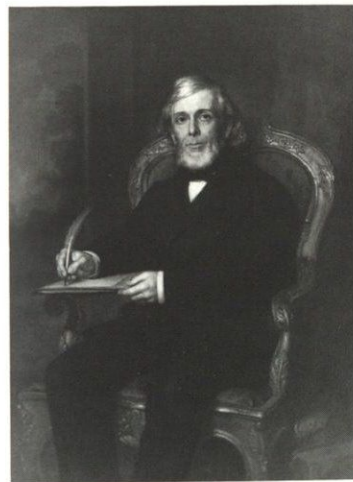


Fig. 4. George Peter Alexander Healy
Portrait of William Greenleaf Eliot, c. 1869–70
 Oil on canvas, 59¼ x 39¾"
 Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis
 Gift in honor of William Eliot Smith by
 his family



Fig. 5. Julien Dupré
Haying Scene, 1882
 Oil on canvas, 21¼ x 18½"
 Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis
 Gift of Mr. Charles Parsons, 1905

including John Max Wulfinf's bequest of a major numismatics collection in 1925, Dr. Malvern B. Clopton's gift of masterprints by such artists as Dürer, Rembrandt, and Whistler in 1930, and the purchase of two paintings, Thomas C. Eakins' *Portrait of Professor W. D. Marks* (1886) and John Henry Twachtman's *House in Landscape* (c. 1890s) in 1936, to fill historical gaps in the collection.¹³

However, the tremendous growth in the City Art Museum gradually displaced the University's collections, which became relegated to storage and inaccessible for faculty and students. Responding to the loss of the collection for academic purposes, the University unveiled a plan in 1929 for "A Washington University Art Center," revolving around the construction of a Museum of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology (fig. 7) and a School of Architecture to join the existing William K. Bixby Hall for the School of Fine Arts. The University proceeded with its ambitions "to become the leading center for the study and teaching of the arts in the middle west" and constructed Givens Hall in 1932. Unfortunately, the great depression followed by World War II suspended the completion of the University's planned art center and the "university's art collection had disappeared from public consciousness altogether."¹⁴ Not until after the cessation of hostilities in the mid-1940s did Horst W. Janson resurrect the plans and continue the tradition of the University art museum.

During his centennial celebration lecture in 1981, Janson recounted that after the war "I became aware of the existence of the Washington University Art Collection." Labels on certain artworks displayed at the City Art Museum triggered his curiosity about the University art collections. Stirred by the "rediscovery" of a major cultural resource, Janson and a group of concerned faculty petitioned Chancellor Arthur Holly Compton to form an Art Collections Committee "to survey the material and to make recommendations as to its future use." As the curator, Janson inventoried the collection in storage at the City Art Museum and found hordes of material, including beer steins, book bindings, and applied arts, that did not fit his conception of art. The committee deaccessioned approximately 750 objects, nearly one-sixth of the entire University collection, and sold the art at auction in 1945. Motivated by the need for "contemporary works in connection with our training in the schools of art and architecture," Janson spent the \$40,000 in income, assembling a collection of 38 paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings that represented his vision of twentieth-century art.¹⁵

Simultaneously, the Art Collections Committee worked toward the realization of the University's 1929 masterplan to build an art museum on campus. Recognizing the economic hardships of the post-war recovery, the committee renovated a classroom in Givens Hall into a gallery "to attract the attention of those who might be in a position to donate such a building." Indeed, St. Louis' leading cultural figures attended the unveiling of Janson's "gallery of modern art" on April 14, 1946, and within ten years the University secured funds for a new museum building. Janson's purchases also captured national attention: *Artnews* reported that "the University has obtained the wherewithal to assemble one of the finest collections of modern art to be found in the Midwest."¹⁶

The legacy of Janson's "gallery of modern art" survives in his "intellectual leadership" that introduced to the Midwest the aesthetic advances of the twentieth-century European avant-garde. Assessing the quality of his purchases, Janson was "proudest" of the Picasso collage *Glass and Bottle of Suze* (1912) and Gris' *Still Life with Playing Cards* (1916) "because they are classic works of cubism."¹⁷ Janson also recognized the contributions of modern American artists and acquired works by William Baziotes, Philip Guston, and Joseph Stella, initiating what his successor, Frederick Hartt, would later expand into a significant part of the collection.¹⁸

After Janson departed for New York University in the late 1940s, the Art Collections Committee appointed Frederick Hartt, professor of Art History, as curator of the University collections. Hartt and the Art Collections Committee focused on the Bixby Fund for the purchase of American paintings to supplement Janson's acquisitions in order "to make the University collection represent the movements we consider the most powerful and most creative in contemporary art." In his first two years Hartt judiciously acquired important early modern American paintings by Arthur Dove, Lionel Feininger, and Marsden Hartley to supplement Janson's acquisitions in this area. He then acquired an impressive collection of the radical new Abstract Expressionists, buying paintings by Arshile Gorky, Philip Guston, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock. Local art critics reacted to these purchases with some skepticism, describing de Kooning's work as "a phantasmagoria in contrasting colors" and Pollock's as "controversial."¹⁹ Despite this critical response, Hartt's acquisitions during this heroic age of American painting resulted in one of the finest university collections of Abstract Expressionist art in the United States.

Within months after the purchase of de Kooning's *Saturday Night* (1956), the University announced that the Visual Arts Center first proposed in 1929 was "closer to reality than many are aware." The University had been negotiating with Mrs. Etta Steinberg to secure funds to build a new museum on campus, to create the University's center of art education and to sustain its role of "cultural leadership." The Steinberg family enthusiastically endorsed the plans for a distinctive modern structure by the young Japanese architect-in-residence, Fumihiko Maki. Maki designed Steinberg Hall to house the University art collections, the Department of Art and Archaeology, and the Art and Architecture Library. Dedicated on May 15, 1960 in memory of Mark C. Steinberg, Steinberg Hall physically linked the visual arts departments on campus with the University's art museum, renamed the Washington University Gallery of Art, as its centerpiece. Maki's dynamic folded-plate design of the building's roof-line metaphorically established the modern tone of the Gallery of Art (fig. 8), which would become recognized by the end of the decade as "a St. Louis Museum of Modern Art."²⁰

William N. Eisendrath, Jr., the first director of the Gallery of Art, announced his aim "to create interest in art through our exhibi-



Fig. 6. The Palace of Fine Arts, designed by Cass Gilbert during the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. The Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis



Fig. 7. "An Art Museum for Washington University" Elevation from brochure, *A Washington University Art Center* (St. Louis: Washington University, 1929) Art and Architecture Library, Washington University, St. Louis



Fig. 8. Steinberg Hall with Alexander Calder's *Five Rudders* (1964)

tions and lectures, making Steinberg a university museum and also a center for those in the community as a whole who are interested in art."²¹ Eisendrath's vital exhibition program and charismatic personality molded the Gallery of Art into one of the most dynamic modern art centers in the country and the center of cultural life in the region. Eisendrath's outstanding exhibitions and acquisitions encouraged a dramatic resurgence in the growth of the University collections during the 1960s.

Over the eight years of his directorship Eisendrath worked to bring a remarkable series of exhibitions to St. Louis, including *New Spanish Paintings and Sculpture* from the Museum of Modern Art in 1961 and retrospectives of Dubuffet and Ernst in 1962, Kandinsky in 1963, Calder in 1965, and Klee in 1967. These exhibitions stimulated great interest among local collectors and resulted in a series of major gifts of art to the University. In commemoration of the dedication of Steinberg Hall Mrs. Etta Steinberg donated funds for Eisendrath to purchase Picasso's late painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1955). Mrs. Steinberg's interest in the Calder retrospective encouraged her to purchase Calder's monumental outdoor stabile *Five Rudders* (1964) that now signals the entrance to Steinberg Hall. Enthusiasm for Eisendrath's program snowballed and led to donations from many of the major collectors in the region—Morton J. May, Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., Sidney M. Shoenberg, Jr., and Charles Yalem. The gifts from these patrons indicated the prevailing regional collecting taste for modern European art. Largely due to the efforts of Eisendrath and these benefactors, *Time* magazine identified Washington University, in its 1967 survey of the recent university art museum boom, as having "built its collection into one unmatched by any school in the Midwest."²²

Robert T. Buck succeeded Eisendrath as director in 1968, continuing his predecessor's successful exhibition programs. Conforming to the original mission for the University's art museum, Buck expanded the contemporary art programs further to "serve both the university and our community in a common educational endeavor." Buck reached out to the regional art community and formed the Steinberg Art Gallery Associates (SAGA), headed by Joseph Helman, a local art collector, "to keep abreast of what's best and latest on the American art scene. Whatever it is they will bring it to Steinberg Hall to exhibit." In a brief two year period Buck and SAGA produced several landmark exhibitions that introduced the region to 1960s avant-garde art. In addition, Buck continued the tradition of collecting modern art, acquiring Stuart Davis' *Max #2* (1949), Gene Davis' *Equinox* (1965), and Tom Wesselmann's *Bedroom Painting #2* (1968). These acquisitions completed the collection of early American moderns and brought the contemporary Washington Color Field School and Pop Art to the University collection.²³

During the three decades after the dedication of Steinberg Hall Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. and Florence Steinberg Weil, direct descendants of the Steinbergs, made the most significant impact upon the University art collections. Their remarkable acumen in collecting post-war European art resulted in the University possessing an extremely significant, and rare, collection of works by Karel Appel, Alberto Burri,

Eduardo Chillida, Pietro Consagra, Jean Dubuffet, Nicolas de Staël, Pierre Soulages, and Antoni Tàpies. Furthermore, the Weil's contribution of paintings by Sam Francis and Robert Rauschenberg filled significant gaps in the modern American painting collection.²⁴ The generous gifts of the Steinbergs, Weils, and other St. Louis collectors continued the tradition of collecting modern art at Washington University through the 1980s.

A century earlier Washington University participated in a national movement for public art and education when it established the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts in 1881. In the 1870s and '80s the United States witnessed an expansion of the public school system and a museum building boom that produced the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1870), the Museum of Fine Arts—Boston (1870), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1876), and the Art Institute of Chicago (1879). Washington University pursued its role of intellectual and cultural leadership at the gateway to the frontier by founding an art museum dedicated "to educate the public taste" and "instil [sic] sound principles of aesthetic culture."²⁵

Now well into its second century, the Gallery continues to realize the University's role of cultural leadership by acquiring and exhibiting contemporary and historical art for both academic and public education. The benefactors, directors, and curators over the past century serve as beacons for current and future Gallery administrators. In the mid-1980s the Gallery revived the University's collecting tradition, embarking on an acquisition program to fill important historical gaps, such as Thomas Cole's *Aqueducts Near Rome* (1832), and contemporary art since the 1970s. Under this program, the Gallery purchased the artwork of Arakawa, John Baldessari, Josef Beuys, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Annette Lemieux, and Tim Rollins, introducing conceptual and post-modern art to our audience. These artworks respond to the changing art and culture since the 1960s and address gender, ethnic, social, and ecological issues central to the art of the 1980s. Although the University and society have experienced fundamental changes over the past two centuries, the Gallery of Art continues to maintain "a gallery of modern art" in fulfillment of founding Chancellor Eliot's vision of the University art museum as a "promoter and creator of greater things to come."²⁶

Joseph D. Ketner, Director
Washington University Gallery of Art