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March 31, 1995

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I. Introduction

A popular mythology exists which claims the museum as a neutral, objective place for viewing art. Contrary to that myth, however, the museum is, by its very nature, anything but objective. It tells stories. Museum staff make decisions everyday as to what those stories will be. They decide what facts to include, what facts to exclude, just as they decide what paintings to hang and what paintings to leave in storage. No museum could give a comprehensive presentation of all its holdings. Choices have to be made.

The museum also cannot provide a neutral viewing of its objects. Every choice of what to display, how to display it, and what to put next to what tells a story about what is important, what is worthy of presentation, and how it connects to art history. Faced with this inevitable situation, the late twentieth century museum staff accepts the fact that it can tell certain stories, but not all of them. They accept the fact that no hanging or presentation of art is absolutely objective. The gallery space itself is not neutral, even its shape and color can influence how an object is viewed. All of these factors come together to determine which stories will be told.

II. Museum History

To understand how the late twentieth century museum came to accept its role, one must first look at the history and evolution of the museum. To begin, the word museum derives from the "Greek *mouseion*, signifying a place or home of the Muses."¹

The concept of a museum as a place to house a collection of objects began with the private collections of the Renaissance. The Medici Palace in fifteenth-century Florence is usually considered the first museum in Europe.² It is an example of one of the private collections which arose among the socially elite. These collections often included classical treasures, as well as modern ones which visually displayed the wealth and status of the owners.

By the end of the sixteenth century, private collections were fairly common among the wealthy and aristocratic Europeans. The collections often contained cabinets in which the objects were organized into systems of classification. The aim was to represent the "*theatrum mundi*," or "a picture of the world."³ Thus even early museum display techniques reflected the stories their owners wanted to tell, just as they reflected their view of the world.

With the outbreak of revolution in France in 1786 a new type of museum arose, one that would eventually include the public as

¹Karl Ernest Meyer, The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics: A Twentieth Century Fund Report (New York: Morrow, 1979), 17.

²Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 23.

³Ibid., 80.

potential visitors. The earlier Renaissance type collections had been reserved only for the private viewing of the elite. But the egalitarian ideas of the late eighteenth century led to the opening of museums to all people. During this period the museum emerged as a public institution. In 1793, Napoleon opened the Louvre.⁴ No longer was art the privileged possession of a selected few, it now belonged to the masses.

When the Louvre opened its doors to the public in 1793, it still reflected the former life of the building as a palace. Now it was a palace of the people and the Grande Galerie, consisting of long, narrow halls, was suitable for the hanging of work, especially the temporary display of works from the Royal Academy. The French theorist J.-N.-L. Durand later, in 1802-5, published a paradigmatic design for a museum, which consisted of a series of long galleries.⁵ (Fig. 1) The long gallery was adopted as the preferred museum design throughout Europe. This design fostered a linear progression through the gallery. Room after room proceeded, forcing the visitor along a rigid path. Other features also evolved during the nineteenth century which added to the palatial appearance of the museum. Karl Friedrich Schinkel's grand stair emerged with his building of the Altes Museum in Berlin in 1823-30.⁶ Schinkel also included the rotunda in his museum. The long

⁴Building the New Museum (New York: Architectural League of New York; Princeton: Architectural Press, 1986), 14.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 16.

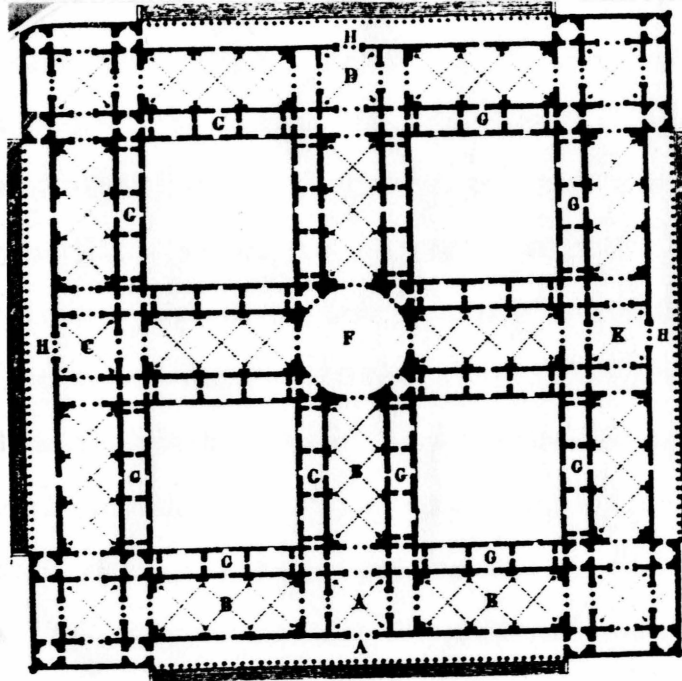


Figure 1. Project for a Museum, J.-N.-L. Durand, 1803.

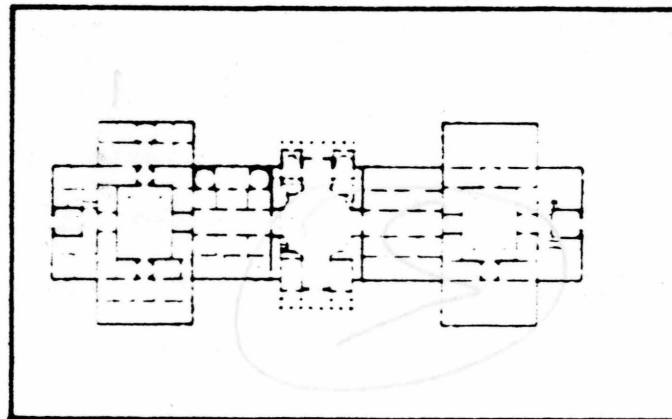


Figure 2. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Plan of Main Floor. John Russell Pope, 1937-41.

gallery or "Durandesque typology of museum design prevailed until the mid-twentieth century."⁷ Evidence in the United States of the Durandesque typology survives in the West Wing of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., designed by John Russell Pope in 1937. The West Wing's plan (Fig. 2) shows a series of rooms arranged consecutively in a row. The long gallery extends down either side of the museum, establishing a clear linear progression through the galleries. Thus whatever story the curator chose to tell, whether of chronological succession or of grouping by style, was laid out in a set pattern that visitors had to follow.

The palatial museum of the nineteenth century continued in popularity until the mid-twentieth century. After World War II a shift in museum design emerged, coinciding with the overall changing purpose of the museum, as well as a change in architectural style. The end of the war found a population in need of a community civic center, and the new, modern museum fulfilled this role. The surge in education after the war also affected the museum world. No longer could museums survive as merely collections of art for the culturally elite. The museum had to find a way to reach the larger audience. To merely see the art was not enough. The general public wanted to understand the art they were seeing. This desire to understand art spurred the increased educational role of the museum. It was not enough to tell the story, people had to understand it.

⁷Ibid., 18.

III. The Museum as Educator

Ever since the Louvre's opening to the public in the late eighteenth century, museums and individuals have attempted to teach the public about art. None of these early efforts, however, compare with the momentous endeavor to educate the public which arose in post-World War II America. With the G.I. bill, educational opportunities were greatly expanded for Americans. Advantages that were formerly only available to the elite were now accessible to the masses.

Even before World War II, there had been a debate between populism and elitism in the art world. John Cotton Dana (1856-1929) and Paul Joseph Sachs (1878-1965), early twentieth century scholars, represented the two opposing perspectives. Dana was chief librarian in Denver, Colorado and later Newark, New Jersey and was elected in 1895 as president of the American Library Association.⁸ As a librarian, Dana felt that the library should uphold its responsibility as a public institution. He stated in his presidential address, "See that your public library is interesting to the people of the community, the people who own it, the people who maintain it."⁹ His concern for public institutions also included the art world. Dana wanted to bring museums to the people, and in 1920 he published *A Plan for a New Museum* in which he called for an institution that would be more than a collection

⁸Meyer, 37.

⁹Ibid.

of objects. He believed that the objects alone did not constitute a museum. A museum required instruction; it needed to educate its visitors.¹⁰

Paul Sachs held the opposite position. He was a firm believer in the scholarly role of the museum. He supported the scholar, curator, and patron, the elite in the museum world. Sachs did believe in education, but he assigned its proper place to the university. From 1921-1948 Sachs taught a museum course at Harvard, which instructed many of the museum professionals of the period. The need for art history classes in the universities had been stated as early as 1864 by James Jackson Jarves in his *The Art-Idea*, but Sachs' museum course was the first of its kind. His course focused on the role of the museum. Eventually many of Sachs' students went on to become directors of the major American museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Art Institute of Chicago.¹¹ Though Sachs called the museum, "not only a treasure house but also an educational institution,"¹² he did not think that education needed extending beyond the elite specialists.

In the 1930's and 1940's, the notion of museum education expanded from Sachs' conception of the specialized training of a select few to one of reaching the majority of the American public.

¹⁰Ibid., 39.

¹¹Ibid., 41.

¹²Ibid.

With Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration and specifically the Federal Arts Project, the United States government supported public art through large murals and local art centers. Following the government's lead, museums also expanded their programs to reach the larger public. To do this museums added Education Curators to their staffs. During the 1950's-1970's Education Curators improved the visitor's experience by initiating guided tours, gallery talks, school programs, and art classes. New wall labels stimulated questions and discussion in hopes of making the viewer an active participant in the museum experience. The goal was public involvement.

The American Association of Museums also took an active stand in formulating standards for the museum's educational role. Those standards included the assertion that as public institutions, museums could not intentionally or unintentionally exclude members of their potential audience.¹³ They also needed to conform to the laws that governed other public institutions. Today, in contrast with the pre-World War II period, the primary goal of most museums is public education.

The American Association of Museums has issued two reports which deal with the issue of museum education. In 1984, for example, the Commission on Museums for a New Century issued its first report which cited the possibilities for museums in the

¹³Ellen Cochran Hirzy, ed., Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums, with a foreword by Robert G. Schwartz and a preface by Bonnie Pitman (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992), 9.

educational field. Building on the 1984 report, the AAM published a second report in 1991 under the title *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*. This report stated that "there is an educational purpose in every museum activity."¹⁴ With the premise that education is paramount in the public museum, the AAM asserted that the educational role is fulfilled by "excellence and equity."¹⁵ Excellence is defined as the continued "tradition of intellectual rigor."¹⁶ Equity is interpreted as the "inclusion of a broader spectrum of our diverse society."¹⁷ The museum, thus, has a two-fold purpose.

Not only does the museum have the responsibility to educate the public, but it also has the added obligation to reach the entire public. The museum must be accessible to all people, regardless of "race, ethnic origin, gender, age, economic status, and education."¹⁸

The call for museums to include all members of the public parallels the changes occurring throughout society. As the world grows smaller, the museum has to reflect its diversity. The new museum also cannot rely solely on the Educational Department to achieve its goal of public education. All departments of the museum must work together to achieve the proper balance of

¹⁴Ibid., 3.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 6.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 8.

excellence and equity. Some curators believe that as public museums succeed in complying with the calls for public responsibility, there should follow greater public support and more government funding.¹⁹ Since it is the national policy to be as inclusive as possible, museums that are inclusive should receive more financial aid.

On March 31, 1994 President Clinton signed a bill called *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. In it the United States government promised support for increased education for the American public. New National Standards for Arts Education, which had been developed by the National Art Education Association, are included in *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. The National Standards asserted that the visual arts, along with dance, theatre and music are "an essential part of the education of every child."²⁰ The implementation of the arts into a school's curriculum is left up to the individual schools, but the standards strongly argue that the well-rounded student is the better educated student. As stated by the National Standards, arts education benefits both the student and society, "the student because it cultivates the whole child, gradually developing intuition, reasoning, imagination, and dexterity into

¹⁹Curator of Education at the Phoenix Art Museum Jan Krulick, interview by author, 27 December 1994, Phoenix, Ariz., Phoenix Art Museum.

²⁰National Art Education Association, Goals 2000: Educate America Act Fact Sheet (Reston, Va.: National Art Education Association, 1994).

unique forms of expression and communication"²¹ and "society because students of the arts gain powerful tools for understanding human experiences, both past and present."²² Thus arts education helps individuals understand themselves and those around them. The assumption is that with the help of art, the individual better understands the diversity of the world.

The March 1994 legislation called arts education an important part of educating the public, but by 1995 the new Republican dominated legislature began to question the very need for organizations like the National Endowment for the Arts. The debate over appropriate budget cuts continues. The National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Institute for Museum Studies, four federal organizations, face the possibility of severe budget cuts. The proposed budget for fiscal 1995 for the NEA was set at \$167 million, but the proposed \$531 million cut for all four organizations would reduce the NEA's funding by one sixth of its current amount.²³ The problem is not simply the allocation of funds, however, but the larger debate over the appropriateness of federal organizations like the NEA.

As witnessed by the Phoenix Art Museum, which receives only

²¹National Standards for Arts Education: Education Reform, Standards, and the Arts (Reston, Va.: Music Educators National Conference, 1994), 5.

²²Ibid., 5-6.

²³Kenneth LaFave, "Culture Wars' Next Battlefield: Arts Agencies on Firing Line in Funding Fight," The Arizona Republic, 22 January 1995, A1.

\$25,000 a year from the NEA toward its total \$3 million budget, museums do not rely solely on the federal government for funds. Federal support does, however, provide a symbol of national support for the arts. In recognizing the arts as worthy of federal funding the government gives its seal of approval to the importance of the arts in the community. Governor Fife Symington of Arizona proposed a 1996 fiscal budget which included a \$400,000 increase for programs supported by the Arizona Commission on the Arts. Symington's proposal, however, is still being debated in the state legislature. Without federal support, local governments have a harder time establishing the necessity of financial support for the arts. Federal recognition filters down to state and local governments and also to private funding. Corporations provide much of the present financial support given to museums. Without the NEA, private donors may hesitate in giving funds. As Jim Ballinger, Director of the Phoenix Art Museum, stated, "If the NEA were voted out, the perception would be that the arts are not an important part of American life."²⁴

The debate examines the importance of the arts and their role in the education of the public. Much of the conflict about the NEA stems from controversial exhibitions funded in part by the NEA. The negative attention focused solely on shows from the late 1980's which included the homoerotic images of Robert Mapplethorpe or Andres Serrano's photograph of a crucifix in urine. Some tax payers objected to federal support of such art and have

²⁴Ibid.

characterized the NEA as an organization which supports only lewd and offensive "art." The truth is that little of the funding for these shows actually came from the NEA. Instead the NEA is responsible for funding more conventional art programs, which rarely receive extensive press coverage.

By focusing only on the controversial exhibitions, all NEA supported programs have been grouped together as extraneous. Under the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, arts education was given a significant position. However, with the threat of abolishing the NEA, the American public must decide how integral the arts are. According to Lynne Munson of the American Enterprise Institute, "When we're cutting back subsidies for farmers and welfare mothers, there's no possible way to justify subsidies for the culturally elite."²⁵ Munson still believes the arts are superfluous, reserved only for the "culturally elite." Her attitude is just what museum professionals are attempting to change, by consciously striving to create a museum experience which extends to the entire public.

In trying to reach the public's needs, museum staffs have turned their attention to the visitor. In doing this, psychological and sociological studies have helped to discern the visitor's needs and desires. These studies produced new means of satisfying the viewer. The museum discovered what type of presentation best responded to the viewer's needs and what type of person most often visited the museum. The studies have shown that the largest constituency of visitors still came from upper and

²⁵Ibid.

middle class society, while the lower classes rarely visited the museum. In trying to understand why the lower classes did not frequent museums, it was discovered that many museum programs ostracized them. Museum exhibitions arranged by curators for the knowledgeable expert demanded an elite audience which excluded those who lacked formal art training. The late twentieth century museum could no longer operate on this elitist level. Attention had to shift from object to viewer. The collection alone could not dominate the museum's concerns. Visitors demanded their attention.

In this shift in attention, the visitor became more of an active consumer than a passive viewer. Consumers demand more from their product. They require customer satisfaction. To do this, the museum had to alter its focus. Visitors had to be actively sought out; advertising and marketing became important concerns. New public relations and marketing staff were added to the museum staff. The museum ceased to be solely an institution for the viewing of art and instead became a corporation, subject to the economic factors which face all major businesses.

The museum, however, relies on outside funding and charitable support in a way that the private collections do not. The museum must appeal to various constituents to acquire their funds. The museum uses Dana's populist argument to gain financial support from the public for educational and practical concerns. While museums, likewise, adopt Sachs' elitist conviction to augment financial support from the private sector for connoisseurship and collection

building.²⁶ While accepting financial support from both groups with opposed expectations, the museum director must constantly juggle demands from both sides.

The director must also answer the conflicting demands of the varying components of the museum structure: the aesthetic concerns of the curator, the financial and philanthropic concerns of the trustees, and the educational concerns of the education staff. The director usually ends up trying to satisfy all and unable fully to please any. In deciding how to organize its collection, the director must take into account all the aforementioned concerns, notwithstanding the type of museum and the objects in the collection. With all these factors in mind, the director must ultimately decide what story the museum will tell, what image the museum will create.

Every museum will have a different message to impart to its viewers, by the very nature of its inherent qualities: type, location, collection, curators, trustees, and educational department. The factors influencing the museums combine in numerous configurations, resulting in a variety of museums. The museum may claim a host of influences affecting its presentation and performance, but the museum is still accountable for the message it conveys. The museum's concerns, in some manner, factor into each museum's decision, and the museum's ability to effectively deliver its message determines its success.

²⁶Meyer, 44.

IV. Stories Museums Tell

Museums have powerful influences on their visitors. The National Museum for Women in the Arts can provide an example of how the specific type of museum affects the presentation it delivers to its visitors. The museum which opened on April 13, 1987 in Washington D.C. exists as a representation of art by women artists. In its specific role of representing solely women, the museum naturally eliminates works that do not meet the criteria. So by its very nature the museum can only tell one story, and even this story cannot be complete because of the impossibility of displaying works by every woman artist. Even its title, "National Museum for Women in the Arts" is misleading for it does not provide an all encompassing survey of women artists, but rather highlights some of the many women artists who have long been ignored by the major museums of the world.

The National Museum for Women in the Arts may not provide a complete representation of the entire history of women artists, but it does offer a 500 piece collection of works from the Renaissance to the present. Wilhelmina Holladay amassed this substantial collection. She began collecting twenty years ago when looking for information on a seventeenth-century Dutch still-life artist, Clara Peters, and found "neither she nor any other woman artist mentioned in the standard college art-history text, H.W. Janson's History of

Art (the recently published third edition includes some women)."²⁷ This prompted Holladay's interest in women artists and led her to found the museum in an attempt to give women artists the attention they deserve. Her purpose of representing women artists governed the story the museum would tell. But Mrs. Holladay has been criticized by both conservatives and feminists for her attempts to establish a museum for women and to tell their accompanying story. The conservatives find her separate museum unnecessary. They still hold the opinion that truly great women artists will naturally be included in major museum collections. However, published facts assert that "95-98 percent of the works in American art museums are by men, even though 38 percent of all American artists are women."²⁸ This lends support to the arguments that a separate museum for women is necessary. The ideal situation would be an art world that based its decisions solely on quality, but until that exists, Holladay's museum offers women artists an opportunity for recognition.

However, the feminists believe the NMWA has not pushed the issue far enough. They criticize Mrs. Holladay for her moderate stance and her claims that the museum should be non-confrontational and apolitical. Holladay once said, "I must stress that we are not a part of the feminist movement."²⁹ This seems impossible given

²⁷Sara Day, "A Museum for Women," Art News 85, no.6 (Summer 1986): 112.

²⁸Anne Higonnet, "Woman's Place," Art in America 76, no.7 (July 1988): 127.

²⁹Day, 112.

her mission of representing women who have been unrepresented in a previously male-dominated art world, but this is Holladay's goal for the museum. In taking this moderate stance, she has separated herself from either affiliation. In attempting to please both sides of the public, she has succeeded in pleasing neither.

The museum's collection has also inspired criticism. Not only is the quality of the works contested but the serious educational role of the museum is also doubted. The museum is divided into six exhibition areas: permanent collection, loan shows, contemporary art, sculpture, prints and photographs and an area for showing art from different states. The division of art by media and period is conventional, but the basic separation of art created by women is unorthodox. Still the separation of works by media and period demands associations between certain pieces of art and excludes other possible cross-references among pieces in different media and periods. The installation of the collection thus limits the possible interactions between pieces of art. The choice of organization offers only one way to view the art in the collection.

The fourteen galleries (Fig. 3) on the two upper floors of the five-story building have small, low ceilings, which are inappropriate for contemporary installation pieces. With only two floors set aside for gallery space, the other three floors hold the Grand Hall, (Fig. 4) a 200 seat auditorium, and a library. The focus of the museum is clearly on entertainment. The Grand Hall and some of the galleries rent as places for gala events at \$7500



View of permanent collection in third-floor galleries of the museum. Photo Gary T. Fleming.

Figure 3. National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Permanent collection in third floor galleries.



*Martin Marietta Hall and
facade (opposite) of the National
Museum of Women in the Arts,
Washington, D.C.
Photos Gary T. Fleming*

Figure 4. National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Martin Marietta Hall.

per night which provides major fundraising for the museum. With chandeliers and pink faux marble, the decoration lends itself to the glittering social functions and reinforces an image of "ladies art."³⁰ It is an image that most critics think the museum should be overturning, not promoting.

In its effort to achieve financial stability, the museum has lost its credibility as a place of education. The need for financial security resulted in the numerous fundraisers, which in turn produced an over-emphasis on entertainment. The museum is seriously understaffed and relies too heavily on volunteer docents. This also promotes an image of lady amateurs. The desire for financial independence is important but as demonstrated in this example, it can create problems when it begins to threaten the institutional validity of the museum. The NMWA serves as an example of both the limits of a specific story and the growing importance of entertainment. In this case the authenticity of the story, as well as the focus on entertainment raised debate.

If the National Museum for Women in the Arts suggests an example of the importance of the museum type and the economic factors which influence the museum's design and hanging, "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920" exhibition held at the National Museum of American Art from March 15 through July 1991 demonstrates just how powerful an installation can be. In this exhibition, William Truettner, curator of the

³⁰Roberta Smith, "Art: 100-Year Survey of Works by Women," The New York Times, 7 April 1987, C14.

show, took well-known American paintings and gave them a new meaning merely by rearranging their presentation and adding extensive wall labels.

The exhibition stands as a testament to the influential role museum curators possess. In one show, Truettner attempted to overthrow preconceived notions held by the American public about art and the history it portrayed of the territorial expansion of the United States. Though Truettner could not completely overturn American history, he did in fact challenge the viewers to reevaluate the history they accepted as fact. He invited the public to consider an alternative history of this period. In posing a question, Truettner stimulated the viewers to think about the messages conveyed by the paintings. The social context he offered was not always accepted, but the exhibition did arouse active public participation. Even the profuse criticism that the exhibit received attested to the fact that "The West as America" had heightened public awareness. As an institution of learning, the exhibition fulfilled the role of educator.

The actual design and hanging of the exhibition accounted for the drastic responses to the show. Truettner divided the exhibition into six sections: "Prelude to Expansion: Repainting the Past," "Picturing Progress in the Era of Westward Expansion," "Inventing the 'Indian,'" "Settlement and Development: Claiming the West," "The West as America" and "Doing the 'Old America.'" "Inventing the 'Indian'" and "Doing the 'Old America'" sparked the most controversy. In fact Truettner felt pressured to rewrite the

labels for the "Inventing the 'Indian'" section because they were too offensive in their original form.³¹ "Doing the 'Old America'" displayed paintings by Frederic Remington, Charles Schreyvogel, Charles Russell, and Henry Farny, and then claimed the paintings were often inauthentic portrayals executed by eastern painters with props. A photograph entitled, Charles Schreyvogel on the roof of His Apartment Building in Hoboken, New Jersey (Fig. 5) dating from 1903 shows Schreyvogel painting a posed model in western attire holding a gun.³² Another photograph attributed to Frederic Remington, Model Posed on a Saddle Display, (Fig. 6) dating from before 1900 shows another model for a painting of the West. The inclusion of the photos casts doubt on the authenticity of their paintings of the West.

Overall the exhibition criticized the false conceptions the paintings conveyed. In an era of expansion the paintings showed idyllic visions of the West, glossing over the harsh realities of the western frontier. The paintings propagated the myth of Manifest Destiny and encouraged support for expansion by glorifying the railroad and other industrial breakthroughs. Truettner argued that the paintings supported America's desires for expansion with little thought to its effects. The painters conveniently transformed the "Indian" from noble warrior (Fig. 7) to brutal savage (Fig. 8) depending on the situation. Truettner asked the

³¹Andrew Gulliford, review of "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920," In Journal of American History 79, no.1 (June 1992): 203.

³²Ibid., 205.



Figure 5. Charles Schreyvogel Painting on the Roof of His Apartment Building in Hoboken, New Jersey. 1903, Photographer unknown.



Figure 6. Model Posed on a Saddle Display, before 1900, albumen print, attributed to Frederic Remington.



Figure 7. Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees, 1822, Charles Bird King.



Figure 8. The Captive, 1892, Irving Couse.

viewers to consider the possible falsification of history that the paintings helped to create.

In general, the exhibition outraged the public. The viewer felt threatened by the attack on his or her perception of American history. Suddenly their notion of truth was questioned and that left the viewers feeling insecure. Visitors felt that their intelligence was under attack as well, since they had a general sense of ignorance about the issues Truettner raised. Truettner admitted the "exhibition was controversial."³³ His intent was indeed to challenge viewers, but he did not claim his story as comprehensive. Rather Truettner stated he attempted to "add to existing interpretations."³⁴

However Truettner's explanation did not satisfy some of the public. Senator Ted Stevens threatened to stop public funding for the institution.³⁵ Whereas the National Museum for Women in the Arts sacrificed serious education for economic independence, the National Museum of American Art suffered the problem of stimulating education without the financial independence to continue the programs it wanted. Herein lies an essential problem facing the museum. The public museum is not autonomous and does answer to the public because of its need for their financial support. Fears like

³³William H. Truettner, "The West and the Heroic Ideal: Using Images to Interpret History," Chronicle of Higher Education 38, no.13 (20 November 1991): B1.

³⁴Ibid., B2.

³⁵Eric Foner, "Fighting for the West," Nation 253, no.4 (29 July 1991): 163.

this have governed the choice of exhibitions that museum directors decide to have at their museums. Challenging exhibitions are sometimes rejected in fear of alienating the public, but the museum's role as an institution of education is subverted when directors refuse to offer controversial messages.

The blockbuster show "Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration" opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. on October 12, 1991 and ran until January 12, 1992. The success of the exhibition demonstrates the public's preference for non-challenging exhibitions. Blockbuster shows usually strive to appeal to a large audience and therefore adopt a moderate stance in their presentation. Funded by both the private sector and Congress, the exhibition bore the responsibility to the public to present an exhibition which met its expectations. The curators for "Circa 1492" adopted a new, but not necessarily controversial, context in which to view many of the masterpieces of the world.

In celebrating the 500 year anniversary of the voyage of Columbus to the New World, the exhibition focused on the one date of 1492 and looked at examples of art produced all around the world. The exhibition offered an alternative to the usual linear, chronological organizations of collections. "Circa 1492" presented an attempt to look "horizontally through space rather than vertically through time."³⁶ While seemingly unconventional in its presentation, the exhibition fell back on a Eurocentric viewpoint

³⁶Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration, Exhibition catalog, ed. Jay A. Levenson (New Haven: Yale University Press; Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 9.

which only considered the countries in their relation to what Columbus and the Europeans were doing, rather than looking at each individual country in its own right.

The curators divided the exhibition into three sections: "Europe and the Mediterranean World," "Toward Cathay" and "The Americas." The beginning of the exhibition lay in Europe and used Europe as a point of comparison to the other cultures. The title also connoted Columbus and his discovery as the hallmark of the exhibition. With these factors, the exhibition still followed a conservative approach to art history, beginning with the western world. The representations of eastern Asia and the Americas before Columbus' arrival did show an amazing breadth of material but the context still reinforced "Eurocentric stereotypes."³⁷

The exhibition also lost a sense of cohesion due to the vast amount of material it included. With over 500 objects presented, the visitor was overwhelmed. Also the curators placed the text panels at the end of the galleries which frustrated the viewer.³⁸ To walk through a gallery without any information as to what he or she was seeing left the viewer often helpless to discern the connections the curators were trying to make. Instead, the curators hoped the visitor would focus on the actual objects while in the gallery, and later find additional information in films,

³⁷Jonathan D. Spence, review of Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration, edited by Jay A. Levenson, In Yale Review 80, no.1-2 (April 1992): 191.

³⁸William Cronin, review of Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration, edited by Jay A. Levenson, In William and Mary Quarterly 49, no.2 (April 1992): 388.

lectures, and the catalogue.

The exhibition enacted a journey from Europe to the far East and on to the Americas. The grouping of art from around the world provided interesting parallels between western and eastern artists such as Albrecht Dürer (Fig. 9) and Sesshu Toyo (Fig. 10). Both artists travelled to learn painting from another country. Yet the focus still tended to return to the European masters with entire galleries given to the works of Leonardo da Vinci (Figs. 11 & 12) and Michelangelo. (Fig. 13) In the end "Circa 1492" did indeed attempt to broaden the focus of the exhibition to include a comprehensive survey of art around the world, but it suffered from its overwhelming collection and broad focus and still fell back into Eurocentric conventions.

In an exhibition, the length of its duration is relatively short, but an installation of a permanent collection will most likely remain in the museum for many years. Exhibitions are usually understood as something impermanent, but permanent collections, even with a longer shelf life, also change. The viewer may find it easier to believe in or to doubt the deliberate stories told by exhibitions, but the permanent collection and its installation also tells deliberate stories. They may be subject to change with the arrival of new directors and curators, additions to the collection, expansions to the museum, and other unpredictable changes, but they still tell stories. The Museum of Modern Art provides a fascinating example of two of the possible stories that can be told by its permanent collection.



Figure 9. Saint Jerome in his Study , 1514, Albrecht Dürer.

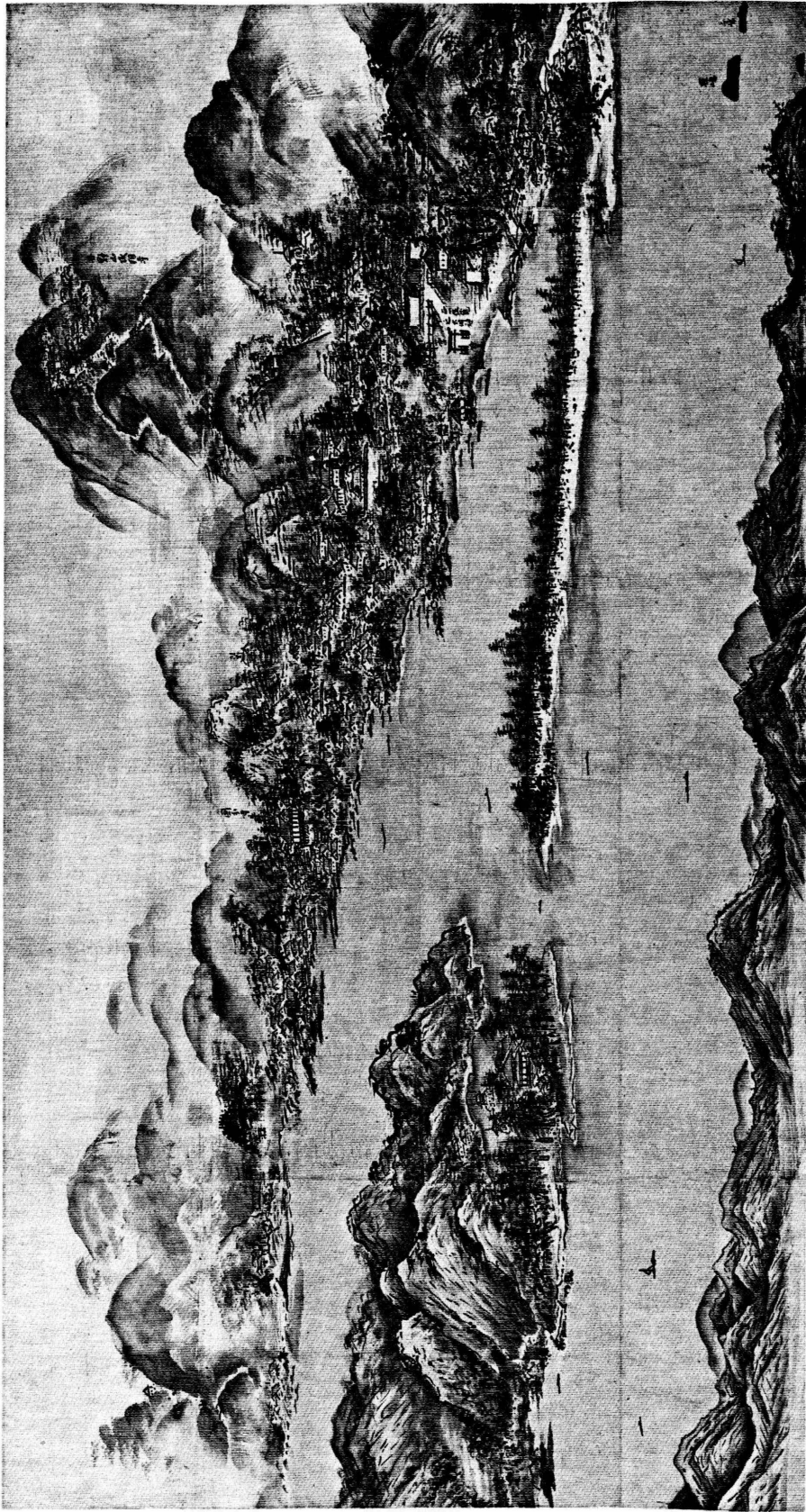


Figure 10. Ama no Hashidate, c.1503, Sesshu Toyo.

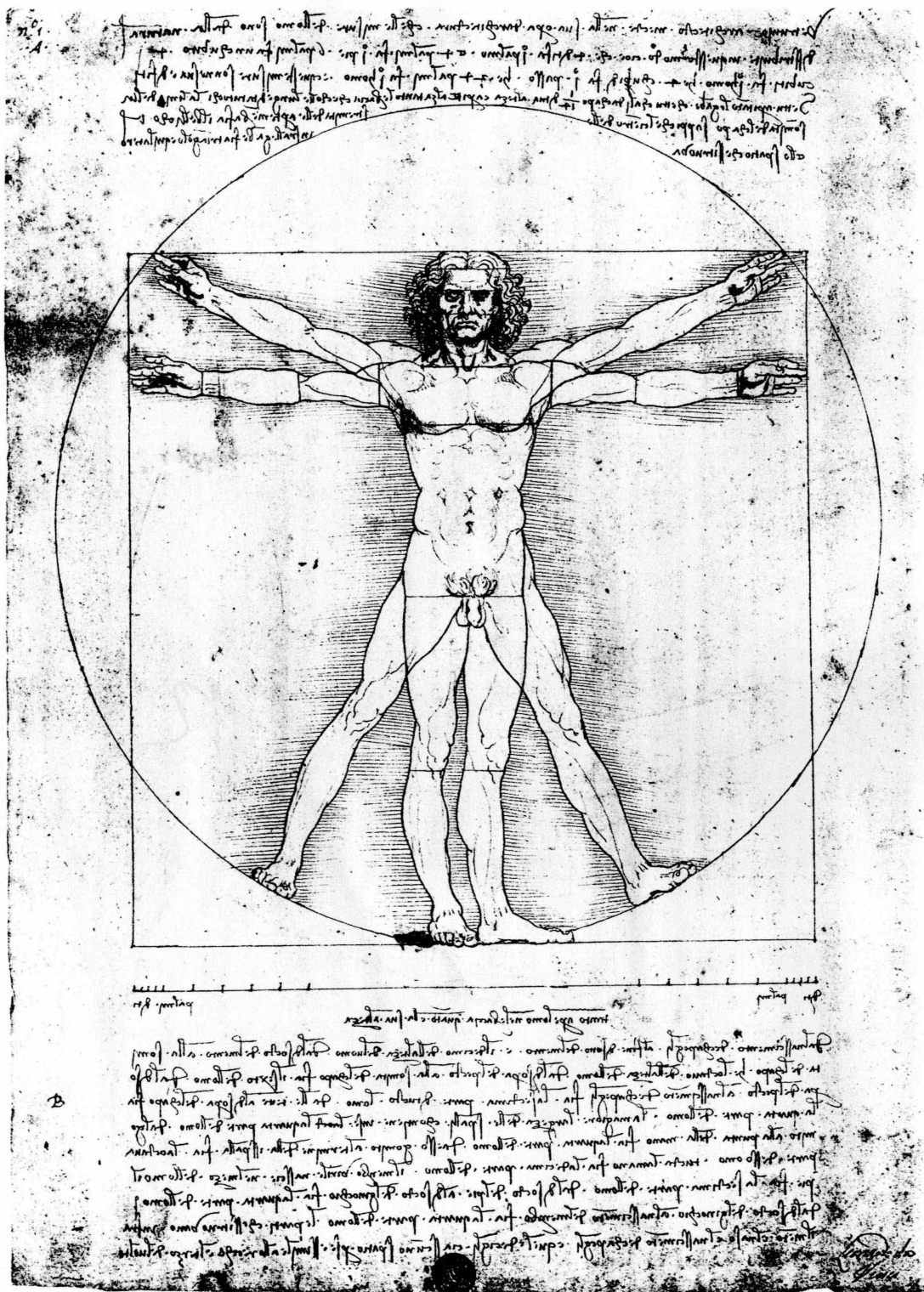


Figure 11. Study of Human Proportion in the Manner of Vitruvius, c.1490, Leonardo da Vinci.

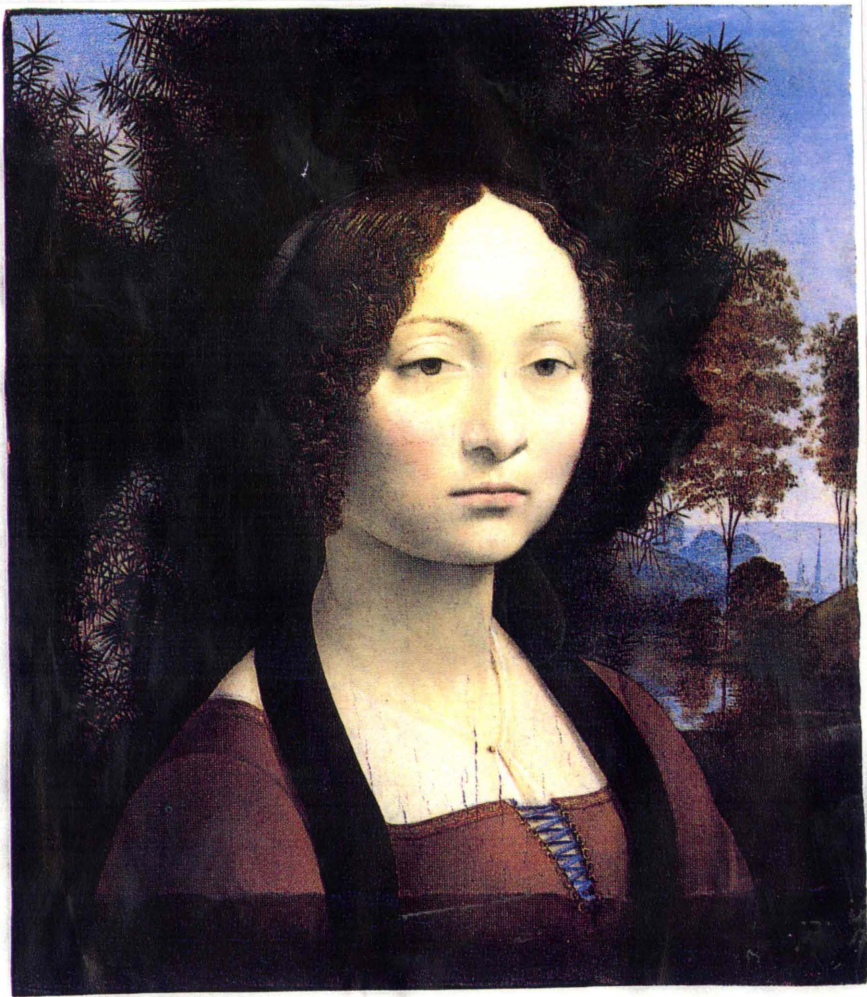


Figure 12. Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, C.1475-76, Leonardo da Vinci.



Figure 13. Madonna of the Stairs, c.1495, Michelangelo.

In 1984 William Rubin reinstalled the permanent collection of MoMA. He had been the director of painting and sculpture since 1973; Richard Oldenburg was then director of the museum. Rubin, a follower of Alfred Barr, the founding director of MoMA, believed in Barr's interpretation of the history of modern art, and their views were reflected in the reinstalled collection. In light of the expansion of the museum, which added two times as much gallery space to the museum, Rubin needed to rehang the permanent collection to fit within the new space. (Figs. 14 & 15)

His overall approach adopted the formalist viewpoint. Following in Barr's footsteps, Rubin focused on Picasso and Cubism. He highlighted the works of Picasso and the Cubist movement as the major focus of Modern art history. The other leading movements, according to Rubin, were Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism, while German Expressionism, Matisse and Dada gained importance only in reference to the primary movements.³⁹ Rubin presented the works in a historical timeline, moving from gallery to gallery in a chronological sequence through art history. The Rubin history began with Post-Impressionism, including Monet, in the late nineteenth century and led up to the landmark painting of "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)" (1895) by Delacroix, heralding the arrival of Impressionism. Rubin strategically placed major paintings near the exits that led into the next gallery because there they demanded attention. Rubin also made the curatorial decision to proceed from

³⁹Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis," Marxist Perspectives (Winter 1978): 35.

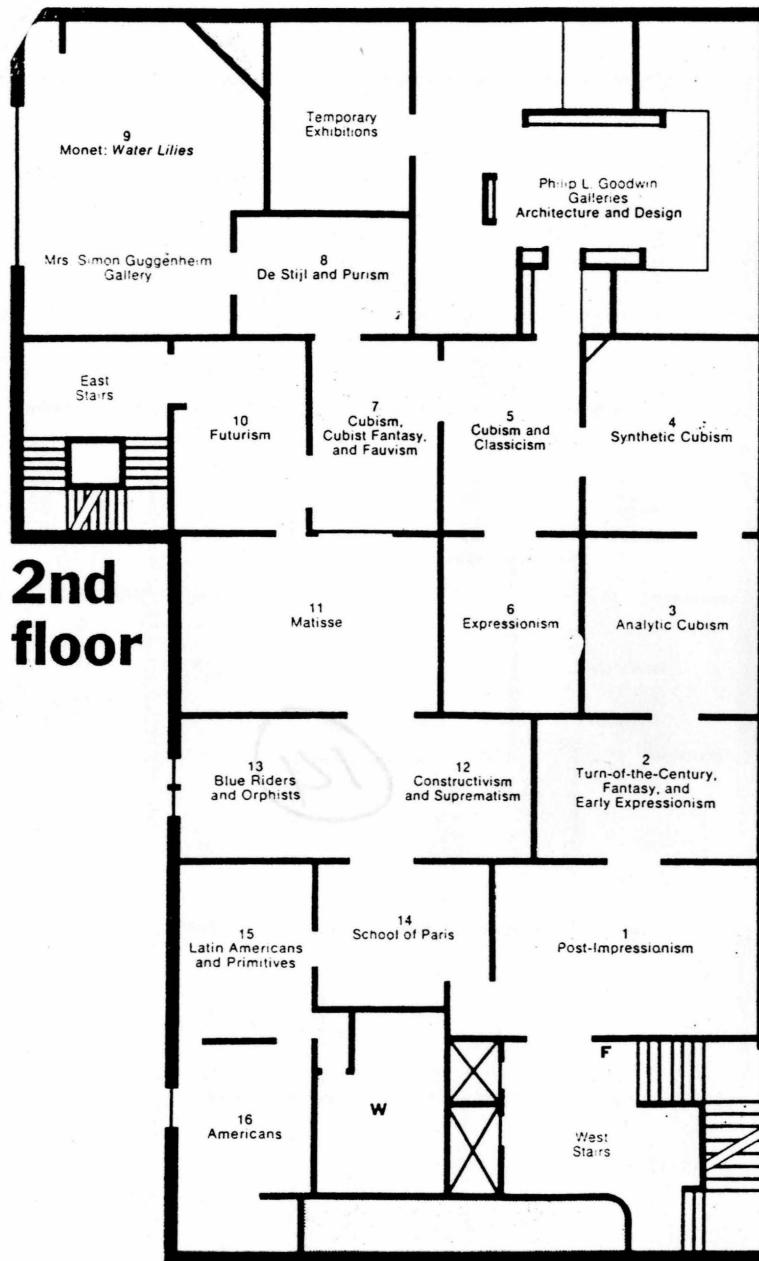


Figure 14. Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y. Gallery plan of second floor, 1984.

"Les Femmes d'Alger" to Analytical Cubism even though historically German Expressionism also coincided with the early developments of Cubism. Rubin opted to keep Cubism in one unit, even if it sacrificed

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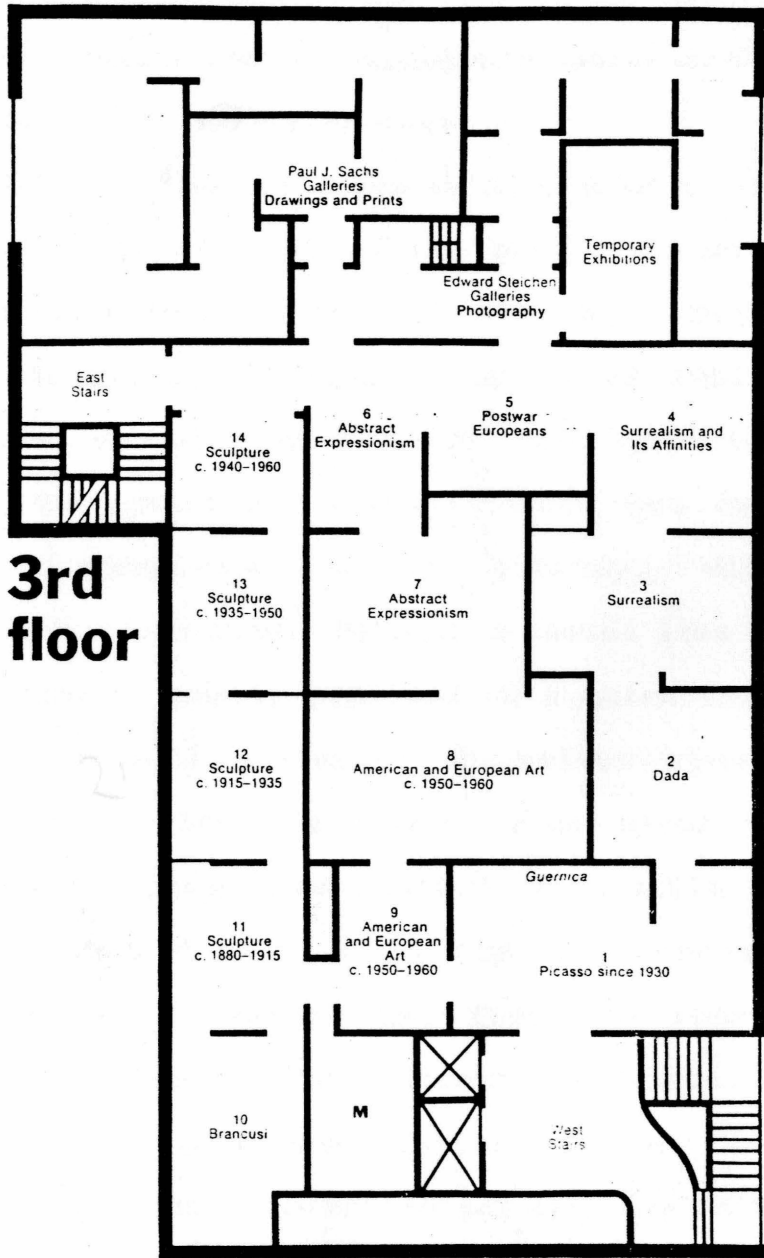
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Figure 15. Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y. Gallery plan of third floor, 1984.

"Les Demoiselles" to Analytical Cubism even though historically German Expressionism also coincided with the early developments of Cubism. Rubin opted to keep Cubism in one unit, even if it sacrificed the total historical accuracy of the gallery plan. Such decisions are routine in a director's determination to place objects in the best possible arrangement.

The division of the galleries by movements or styles made the individual paintings examples of the particular movements rather than separate paintings in their own right. Often the viewer perceived a Picasso as a primary example of Cubism instead of looking at the singular quality of the specific work. The hierarchy of the paintings clearly stood out due to Rubin's placement of masterpieces near the doorways, which made them visible from many rooms away. Paintings deemed less important were pushed into corners, easily bypassed on a quick trip through the galleries. The small galleries themselves wound along in a labyrinthine manner, with side venues for the minor movements. The visitors followed a prescribed route.⁴⁰ With galleries possessing one clear entrance and exit, there was little room for creative viewing. The path clearly lead from one room to another, effectively leading the visitor through each successive movement.

As a whole, Rubin's installation ignored the later post-minimal works, earthworks and conceptual art. He felt this type of art was not suited for a conventional museum. Some art, Rubin felt, was better placed outside the museum context. According to

⁴⁰Ibid., 34.

Rubin, museums should hold the already established art, while galleries should show contemporary artists' works.⁴¹ With this belief, Rubin focused on the history of Modern art through 1960. In 1984, the seventies were still a recent decade not quite incorporated into the canon of art history and still lingering in the contemporary art scene. But a decade later, the art of the seventies and eighties demanded incorporation into the history of art.

In 1993, Kirk Varnedoe fulfilled this need for the expansion into the decades after the 1960's. Varnedoe became the director of painting and sculpture for MoMA in 1988 when Rubin retired. Varnedoe had been a subordinate curator at MoMA since 1984. In his mid-forties, Varnedoe belongs to a different generation than Rubin. His knowledge of art ties him closer to the art which Rubin ignored. To Varnedoe, contemporary art is essential to his story of Modern art: "In part my experience of contemporary art affects the way I tell the story - how modernism's energies and origins have been rethought."⁴² Varnedoe extended the story from stopping at Sam Francis and Morris Louis to including Donald Judd, Claes Oldenburg, and Jacques de la Villeglé.⁴³ Ten years later, these artists had shifted from the contemporary realm to the history of

⁴¹Lawrence Alloway and John Coplans, "Talking with William Rubin: 'The Museum Concept is not Infinitely Expandable,'" Artforum 13, no.2 (October 1974): 52-56.

⁴²Robin Cembalest, "The Ghost in the Installation. (Reinstallation of the Museum of Modern Art's Permanent Collection)," Art News 92, no.9 (November 1993): 141.

⁴³Ibid.

modern art.

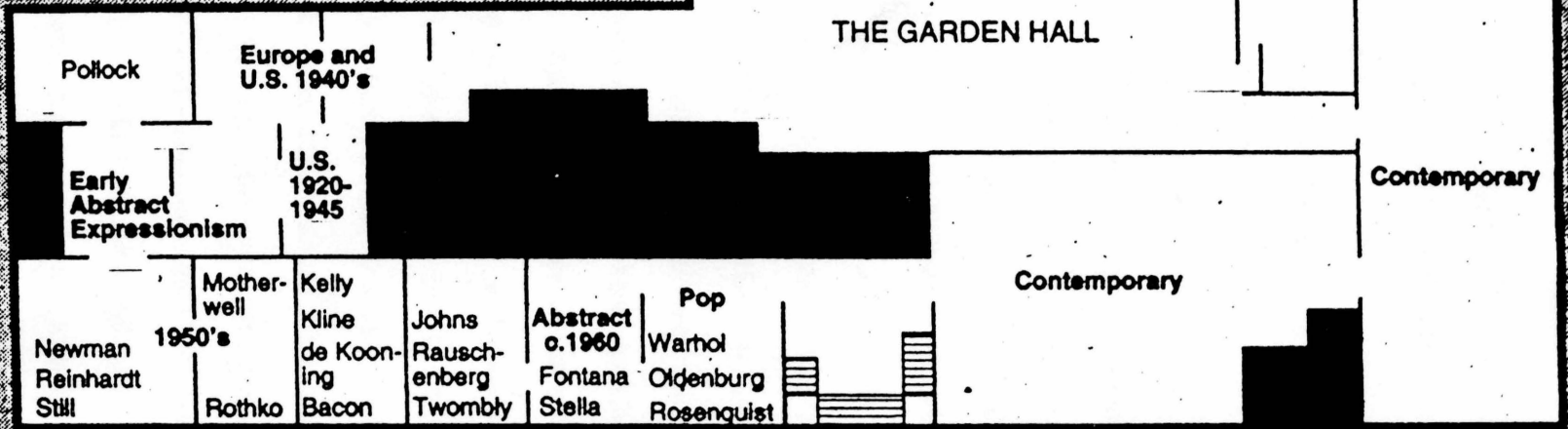
It is this factor of the everchanging aspect of time that necessitates a constant process of upgrading a collection. What sufficed ten years ago naturally becomes obsolete. Hence, though the art objects themselves may not change, the story the curator tells with them does. Varnedoe recognized this fact and shifted the focus of MoMA's collection to coincide with the prevailing trends of the nineties. The present decade looks to the social context of the works. Varnedoe followed this trend with a shift from formalism to social context. His installation (Fig. 16) gave more attention to Duchamp and Russian Constructivists. Duchamp's readymade stimulated intellectual thought about the question, "What is art?." His objects held significance for the questions they inspired, rather than for any formal qualities. The Russian Constructivists lived in a period of social upheaval. Their art reflected the revolutionary times. Both Duchamp and the Russian Constructivists dealt with the intellectual and social implications of art. These were messages that Varnedoe wanted to convey.

Varnedoe had to sacrifice Picasso and Cubism in order to make room for the works of Duchamp and others. Once again the inevitable exclusions arose. With Varnedoe's choice came the necessary removal of several of the Cubist works. Using most of the same objects of the collection, Varnedoe overturned Rubin's story and implemented a new one of his own. He reorganized the progression of styles so that Expressionism coincided with its historical place with Cubism, an option Rubin declined by keeping

New Galleries at the Museum of Modern Art

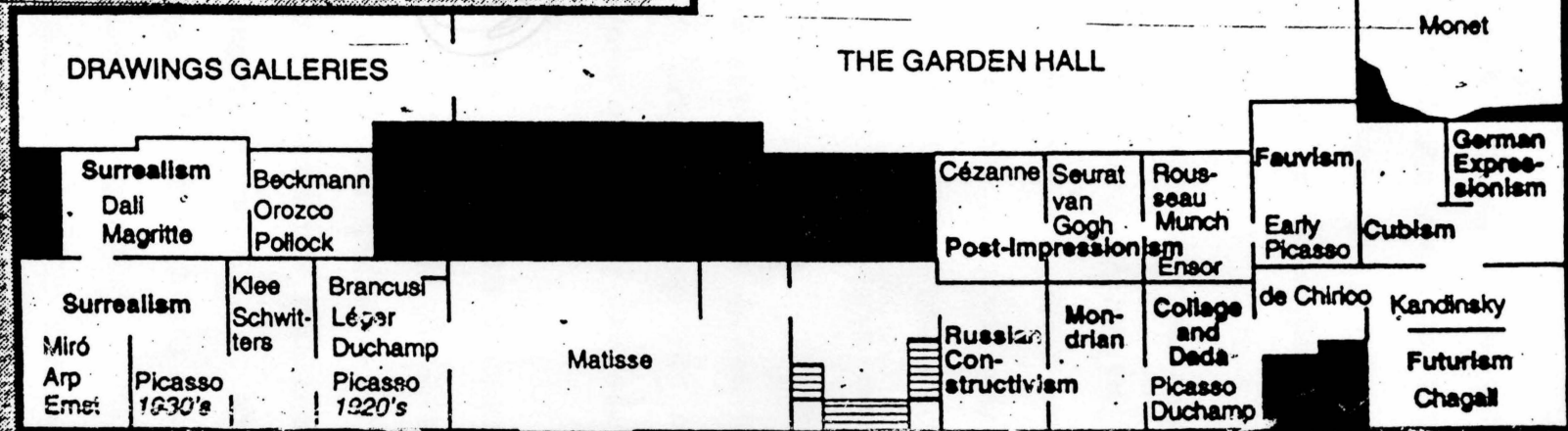
Third Floor

Painting and Sculpture Galleries



Second Floor

Painting and Sculpture Galleries



Source: Museum of Modern Art

Figure 16. Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y. Gallery plan of second and third floors, 1993.

Cubism as one unit. Like the "Circa 1492" exhibition, Varnedoe's installation looks horizontally across Europe in the years 1913-14 before World War I. Dada, Futurism, and German and Austrian Expressionism appear in the galleries with Cubism to juxtapose the movements of the era.

The attention Varnedoe gave to Russian Constructivism also contrasted with Rubin's installation. Earlier relegated to a stairwell, the Constructivists now occupy a gallery of their own with posters conveying the social message of the revolutionary period. Varnedoe sees these artists, such as Tatlin, as models for the fifties and sixties artists who also strove to break down social barriers. Hence Varnedoe's focus on later artists in the history of art directly relates to the added attention he gives to the Constructivists. Varnedoe also brought art by women out of storage and placed it in the galleries. Here again his decision reflects the changing interests of the time.

Varnedoe effectively extended the history of art to include the social influences deemed important and to include decades ignored in the previous installation. He added new galleries to hold art from the 1970's to the present and restored the ceilings to fourteen feet to accommodate contemporary works. His installation has fewer galleries, 28 instead of Rubin's 32. Altogether this diminishes slightly the maze-like quality of the galleries, but the physical space of the galleries still limited the possibilities for organizing the space. Varnedoe brought MoMA's collection into the 1990's, but his story is not absolute.

With the onset of the twenty-first century, in all likelihood, a new story will come forth which puts the art of the nineties into its historical context.

The nineties were a time of great change and challenge. The art world was in a state of flux, with many artists exploring new forms and mediums. The physical space of art galleries and museums was also undergoing a period of transformation, with many institutions expanding their collections and programs.

The physical space of art galleries and museums is a complex one, with many factors influencing the possible configurations. The size of the building, the location, the climate, and the budget are all important considerations. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is a prime example of a museum that has successfully navigated these challenges. The LACMA building is a masterpiece of modern architecture, with its unique design and materials creating a space that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing. The museum's collection is also one of the most comprehensive in the world, with works from a wide range of cultures and time periods.

The art world of the nineties was also characterized by a growing interest in social and political issues. Many artists were using their work to comment on the state of the world, and this was reflected in the art that was being exhibited in galleries and museums. This was a time of great social and political change, and the art world was playing a significant role in the conversation.

V. The Problems of Museum Space

As public institutions, museums must meet the public's demands. Museum personnel now focus on programs to bring the people to the museum, and this overriding concern governs many of the directors' decisions in planning exhibitions and hanging permanent collections. The directors work with a limited physical space, with a select group of objects, and with the need to deliver a presentation that is both educational and accessible.

The physical design of a gallery restricts the possible configurations for the hanging. Structural supports, wall height, and square footage are unavoidable restraints. Some museum directors, such as Jim Ballinger of the Phoenix Art Museum, have opted to build only the surrounding walls of their changing exhibition galleries and construct the interior walls in conjunction with the individual shows. The Los Angeles County Museum also uses its entire ground floor space for changing exhibitions. The absence of permanent walls makes for greater flexibility. One show could use the entire space or multiple shows could share the space. This allows the museum to respond to the varying needs of the different exhibitions.

Walls are painted to present an appropriate background for the works displayed. White is a favorite wall color for contemporary works. Dark blue and dark red compliment portraits of political and historical leaders. Some exhibitions result in period rooms that are constructed to house the works from a given period. The

idea is to discover which background provides the best surroundings for the objects. With movable walls, the possibilities are increased. The museum personnel work within the determined physical limits to offer the most diverse exhibitions in the same space.

The museum world is constantly changing. What was common practice in the sixties is now replaced with a new philosophy. Directors change their opinions on the absolute gallery environment. New information arrives on what constitutes the best viewing experience, and the directors change the gallery space. In a symposium held in December 1985, men and women involved in various aspects of the art world met to discuss the surge of museum building in the late twentieth century and to speculate as to its cause and effects. According to Suzanne Stephens, moderator for the symposium, the "loftlike neutral modernist space favored in museum design of the last several decades" is being replaced by the "traditional roomlike gallery."⁴⁴ The amorphous space of the open loft still suits the temporary gallery space, but the defined room seems more hospitable to the permanent collection. Perhaps the visitor enjoys the confines of a room which focuses his or her attention on a given selection of objects. The large, open gallery may overwhelm the viewer with a bombardment of images and no context in which to read them. This distinction between the small, enclosed room and the large, undefined gallery exists in the contemporary gallery at the Phoenix Art Museum.

⁴⁴Building the New Museum, 92.

The actual walls determine the gallery space, but they alone do not define the presentation of the objects. The lighting is extremely important both for atmospheric and physical effects on the objects. Robert Hughes, art critic for Time and participant in the symposium, prefers natural light because he believes, "museum lighting tends to isolate the unfortunate masterpiece like a rabbit caught in the glare of a halogen lamp on the road at night."⁴⁵ The virtue of natural light is its overall coverage, which Hughes particularly admires in the Matisse room at MoMA.⁴⁶ The vice of artificial light is its "theatricality,"⁴⁷ which spotlights the painting. The painting then exists as a single work on display, rather than an object in a given environment. The spotlights reduce associations between paintings, isolating the individual works as separate and unrelated entities. The use of artificial light in the museums is necessary today due to the delicate nature of paintings. The knowledge about the destructive quality of natural light deters directors from placing any paintings or drawings in direct sunlight. In fact the graphics galleries at the Phoenix Art Museum use a low level artificial lighting, and the curators rotate the works often. The drawings not on display remain in dark drawers, free from the damaging rays of the sun. Paintings, as well, crack and fade due to direct exposure to sunlight and to extended display under artificial lights.

⁴⁵Ibid., 29.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 33.

Conservationists repair light damage and rotate the paintings to reduce exposure to light.

The other significant reason to use artificial light in the gallery involves the artist's use of artificial light to actually paint. According to Hughes, this is "certainly true of a great deal of painting since 1960. The standard lighting in the studio is no longer north light."⁴⁸ With artists painting with artificial light, it seems appropriate to exhibit the work with artificial light in accordance with the artist's intentions while creating. The museum then imitates the artist's environments.

However, some curators still prefer natural light and try to discover ways of using natural light without suffering from its damaging effects. According to Suzanne Stephens, they prefer the "subtle and changing tonalities it casts on the art."⁴⁹ The most desirable situation relies on a combination of incandescent light and natural light, using skylights. Incandescent light gains more approval than fluorescent light.⁵⁰ Natural lighting from windows serves a double purpose, by also orienting the viewer to his or her surroundings.

The debate about light continues with varying opinions based on the museum and its collection. The discussion also continues on the best type of gallery. Arthur Drexler, another participant in the symposium, argues that:

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., 92.

⁵⁰Ibid.

Small pictures tend to look better in smaller-sized rooms. But big pictures do not necessarily look better in very big rooms. Quite often they look best in small rooms where the sheer concentration of space forces the energy of the picture to come at you full blast.⁵¹

Sometimes curved walls create an interesting environment, but other times they do not. Large works hung on the curved walls at the Guggenheim disturb the viewer because he or she notices the uneven space between the sloping floor and the bottom of the painting. Again, the display decisions are subjective. No single rule governs museum lighting, just as no single rule dictates gallery hanging. The possibilities depend on specific museums and their personnel.

The museum meets the public in various roles: aesthetic, economic, and educational. The museum preserves the works, houses the collection, and educates the public. In trying to play these roles, the museum staff places art in the confines of the museum, where the art can tell unlimited stories. Depending on the individual museum and its concerns, the viewer receives a prescribed message, a means to understand what it is he or she sees. Inside the museum the visitor enters a prescribed reality, controlled by the objects and the space they occupy, and all subject to the particular museum in question.

⁵¹Ibid., 57.

VI. History of the Phoenix Art Museum

When most of the major museums in the United States were founded, Arizona was not even a state. The relative youth of Arizona, and its capital Phoenix, is an important factor in understanding the nature of the Phoenix Art Museum. The "newness" directly affected the type of museum produced in the city. Thus, understanding the Phoenix Art Museum, as it stands in 1995, necessitates a look at the history and the growth of both the city and the museum.

The history of the Phoenix Art Museum reflects the history of the city. When the museum first opened on November 15, 1959, the new \$4,000,000 building had only 25,000 square feet. The city of Phoenix's population stood at 250,000 in 1955, when plans for the museum building were underway. Forty years earlier in 1915, the population of Phoenix had only been 25,000. By 1984, the population had risen to 849,000, and, in 1995, at close to one million, it is still growing.

With such a rapid rate of growth, the museum also had to expand to continue to meet the city's needs. The origins of the museum lay in the Phoenix Women's Club, which formed in 1915 to begin collecting art for the Phoenix Municipal Collection. The Phoenix Fine Arts Association, formed in 1925, also took on the task of amassing a collection and organizing an art gallery. However, these groups were not immediately successful in instituting a permanent housing space for art. President Roosevelt's Works

Progress Administration program helped bring artists such as Philip C. Curtis and Lew E. Davis to Phoenix. Even after the program ended in 1937, these artists remained in Phoenix to promote art in the area.⁵²

Despite these early attempts to foster an art center in Phoenix, no substantial progress occurred until January 16, 1940, when Mrs. Dwight B. Heard, heiress to the Adolphus Bartlett estate, donated 6.5 acres of land at the northeast corner of the intersection of Central Avenue and McDowell Road to house a Civic Center, comprised of a Fine Arts Building, a Little Theatre and a Public Library.⁵³ At this point the Civic Center Association was formed to raise funds for the buildings. The plans were put on hold with the outbreak of WWII, and a small brick building on Coronado Road served as the Civic Center House (later known as the Art Center) and housed exhibitions and art classes until the Phoenix Art Museum opened in 1959.

When the museum opened in 1959, it was housed in a new three-floored building, which offered space for exhibition galleries, offices, studio rooms, an auditorium and a library. Only one of the buildings in the Civic Center, the Public Library and Little Theatre also comprised part of the complex and were joined to the museum building with overhangs and walkways. (Fig. 17) They formed

⁵²Hazel Stone and Lisa Schleier, eds., Phoenix Art Museum: A History (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984), 1.

⁵³"An Opportunity and a Challenge: Your New Phoenix Art Museum: An Enlarged Cultural Force in Our Community" (Phoenix, Ariz.:Phoenix Fine Arts Association, [1957?]), 4.

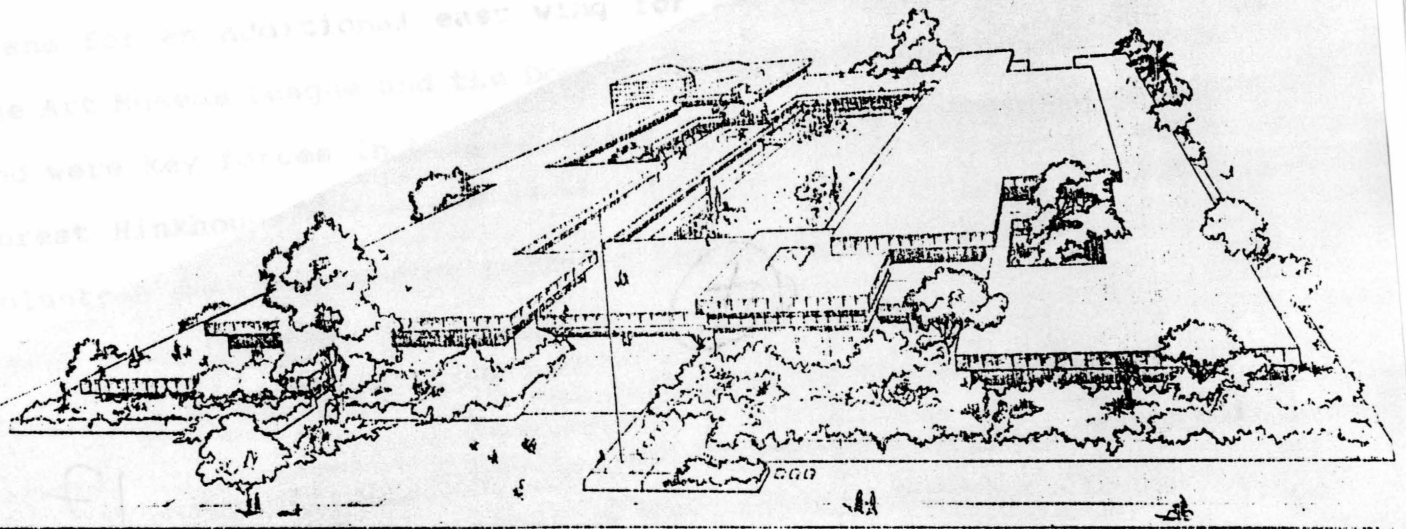


Figure 17. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Plan of Exterior. 1959.

a square around a central courtyard and reflecting pool. The three buildings in the Civic Center were designed to contribute to a uniform structure. The exterior consisted of "stuccoed masonry, glass and anodized aluminum."⁵⁴ The interior of the museum was a flexible open space which could be expanded in the future. Fluorescent lighting was used throughout the building, as was climate controlled air-conditioning, an important factor due to Arizona's extreme summer heat.⁵⁵

Phoenix continued to grow as did the new museum. By 1961 plans for an additional east wing for the museum were announced. The Art Museum League and the Docent Committee had been established and were key forces in helping raise funds for the expansion. Dr. Forest Hinkhouse, director of the museum since 1957, trained the volunteer docents to give tours of the collection, which included works from the late fourteenth century to contemporary art. The diversity of the collection was reflected by the diversity of the donors. Unlike other museums, the Phoenix Art Museum relied on numerous donors, rather than a few major individual ones, to support expansion of its collection.⁵⁶

When the new east wing opened on November 18, 1965, just six years after the museum's original opening, the museum's total space

⁵⁴Ibid., 3.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Collecting: Phoenix Art Museum 1957-1984 (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984), 3.

had tripled to 75,000 square feet. (Fig. 18) New galleries came with the new space, along with offices, classrooms, a sculpture courtyard and a new auditorium. The old space was remodelled to accommodate the new additions. Not only was the Singer Auditorium built, but the library was relocated to the basement to make room for the gift store. The new wing meant that the museum received national and international attention.⁵⁷ The Phoenix Art Museum was beginning to make a name for itself.

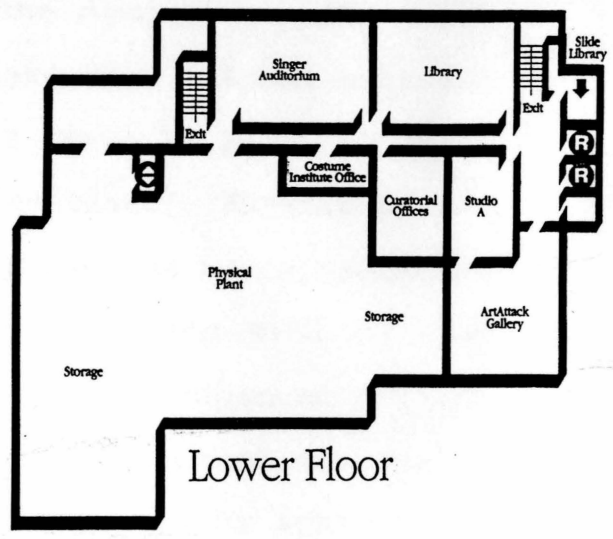
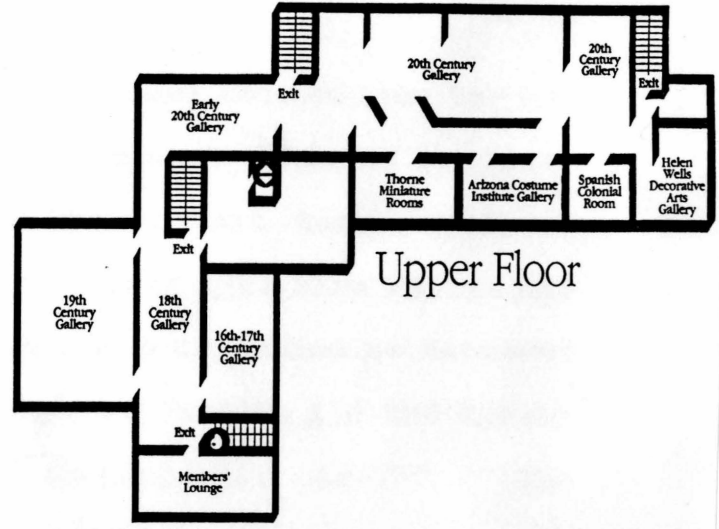
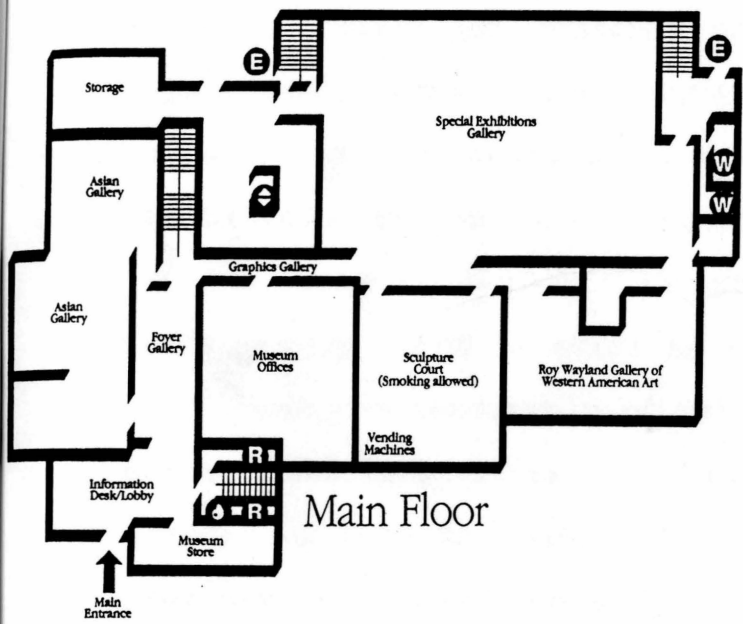
The educational role of the museum grew with the increase in size. Student and adult tours expanded to become more regular features. Some 149,000 people visited the museum in 1962; 170,000 people visited the museum in 1964. In a population of 513,000, the statistics show fairly good attendance. These numbers multiplied with the east wing expansion and the increased attention given to publicity. Hinkhouse resigned in 1968, to be replaced by Hugh T. Broadley. Broadley worked with Arizona State University to offer art history seminars which boosted museum attendance.⁵⁸

During the next years, the museum continued its steady growth. In 1969 Goldthwaite Higginson Dorr, III took over as director and led the celebration of the museum's tenth anniversary. The volunteer program increased to 270 docents who now underwent a two-year training program. Ronald Hickman, the next director, arrived in 1973 and led the museum to even higher attendance records. Seminars and exhibitions continued to draw the public to the

⁵⁷Stone and Schleier, 4.

⁵⁸Ibid.

Map of the Phoenix Art Museum



| | |
|---|--|
| R Restroom | Elevator <i>(located in Non-Public area, ask Security Officer for assistance)</i> |
| W Wheelchair Accessible Restroom | Stairs |
| E Emergency Exit | |
| Water Fountain | |

Figure 18. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Gallery plan.

museum. In 1977 "'Art Breaks,' a noontime series of tours and concerts"⁵⁹ appeared as a permanent feature on the museum's schedule. These mid-day talks continue to draw visitors today.

In 1979 the twentieth anniversary of the museum marked the arrival of James K. Ballinger to curate the "Beyond the Endless River" exhibition. Ballinger received national recognition for the show and its catalogue. Once again the museum achieved national success. Ballinger remained at the Phoenix Art Museum and was appointed director in February 1982. The year 1982 also marked the formation of the Contemporary Forum, a group organized to "sponsor exhibitions and seminars on contemporary art and to aid the Museum in its acquisition of important contemporary art."⁶⁰ The Contemporary Forum is still an active group in the museum.

Under the leadership of Ballinger, the museum began its first major membership drive in 1983. By 1984 the members totalled 4,700. As both the city and museum have grown in physical size, they have equally grown in national recognition. Phoenix is now a major metropolis, and the Phoenix Art Museum is now a major art institution in the southwest. Still a young city with an even younger museum, the future holds promise for expansion of both.

The Phoenix Art Museum continues to maintain both national prominence and regional individuality. The various exhibitions held during the past two years exemplify the museum's diverse strengths. In conjunction with other American museums, the Phoenix

⁵⁹Ibid., 5.

⁶⁰Ibid., 6.

Art Museum housed the "Picturing History: American Painting 1770-1930" which opened in December 1994. The national significance of this show was obvious as a celebration of the growth of the nation. Conventional in content and presentation, the exhibition acclaimed national heroes like George Washington. Traditional shows like this satisfy certain visitors. However, the museum also looks beyond the confines of conventionality.

In following the museum's goal to stimulate and challenge its visitors, the Phoenix Art Museum held "Contemporary Identities: 23 Artists, the 1993 Phoenix Triennial." The Triennial show represented works by artists currently working in the Southwest: Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The exhibition dealt with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The theme of multiculturalism was hardly a novel one, but Bruce Kurtz, curator of the exhibition, claimed it was singular in its treatment of specifically Southwest artists. His goal for the show was one of "becoming more inclusive of all of the people and cultures that exist in the Southwest."⁶¹ Kurtz wanted to bring the message of multiculturalism to the people of Arizona. In fulfilling the museum's role as educator, Kurtz reaffirmed this educational purpose: "That is an important role the museum plays, to educate the public about the recent developments."⁶²

⁶¹Lynn Pyne, "Southwestern Shadings: Triennial Showcases Avant-Garde," The Phoenix Gazette, 21 August 1993, D1.

⁶²Richard Nilsen, "Accent on Pride in 'Identities:' Contrasts with the Politically Correct Whitney Biennial in New York," The Arizona Republic, 22 August 1993, E3.

Education sometimes comes in the form of confrontation, as was the case with some of the works in the show. HIV-infected blood was encased in resin to make a paper weight. The accompanying label explained the impossibility of transmitting the virus in this medium, yet visitors still approached the work with apprehension. The docents received special training to prepare them for dealing with visitors' questions and fears. The show was bound to receive negative reactions when confronting such emotional issues, but the fact remains that the Triennial stimulated thought. By presenting challenging subject matter to its audience, the museum, as Kurtz put it, had achieved a "way of opening up to a greater diversity of art."⁶³ It had educated the public about the various identities in the world.

The museum also continues to represent regional art and artists in a more conventional manner. The "Cowboy Artists of America" Twenty-ninth Annual Show in 1994 featured a more traditional approach to southwestern art. This yearly exhibition draws attention to the regional strengths of the museum and celebrates the state's heritage. Whether the museum chooses traditional shows or innovative exhibitions, the primary purpose is still educating the public.

To keep up with the increasing demands on the museum, the museum is in the process of expanding. With an additional 45,000 square feet, the Phoenix Art Museum will increase its existing space to a total of 172,000 square feet. Not only will the new

⁶³Pyne, D1.

museum include additional buildings, but the present buildings are undergoing renovation and the result will be a completely new museum. It will include 20 galleries, two libraries, an auditorium, classrooms, great hall, a shop and a restaurant. (Figs. 19-22)

The additional gallery space is always a necessary factor in expansion. Adding galleries increases the available space for hanging more of the collection. A larger collection enhances the prominence of the museum.

The libraries and the enlarged auditorium (Fig. 23) represent the increasing role of education. The museum will offer a library for research and an auditorium for lectures, both serving the educational purpose of the museum. The classrooms will primarily be for school groups and hands-on programs, which will help expand educational opportunities.

The great hall, the larger shop, and the new restaurant will all help reinforce the museum as a place of entertainment. Education may be the primary purpose of the museum, but making it an enjoyable and comfortable place to visit also helps bring in revenue. The great hall (Fig. 24) will serve to entertain the public during openings and fundraising events. The larger shop will provide more opportunities for visitors to support the museum with their purchases. The new restaurant will undoubtedly generate money for the museum.

Perhaps the most visible addition to the museum will be the 80-foot-high translucent cone (Fig. 25) which will cover the

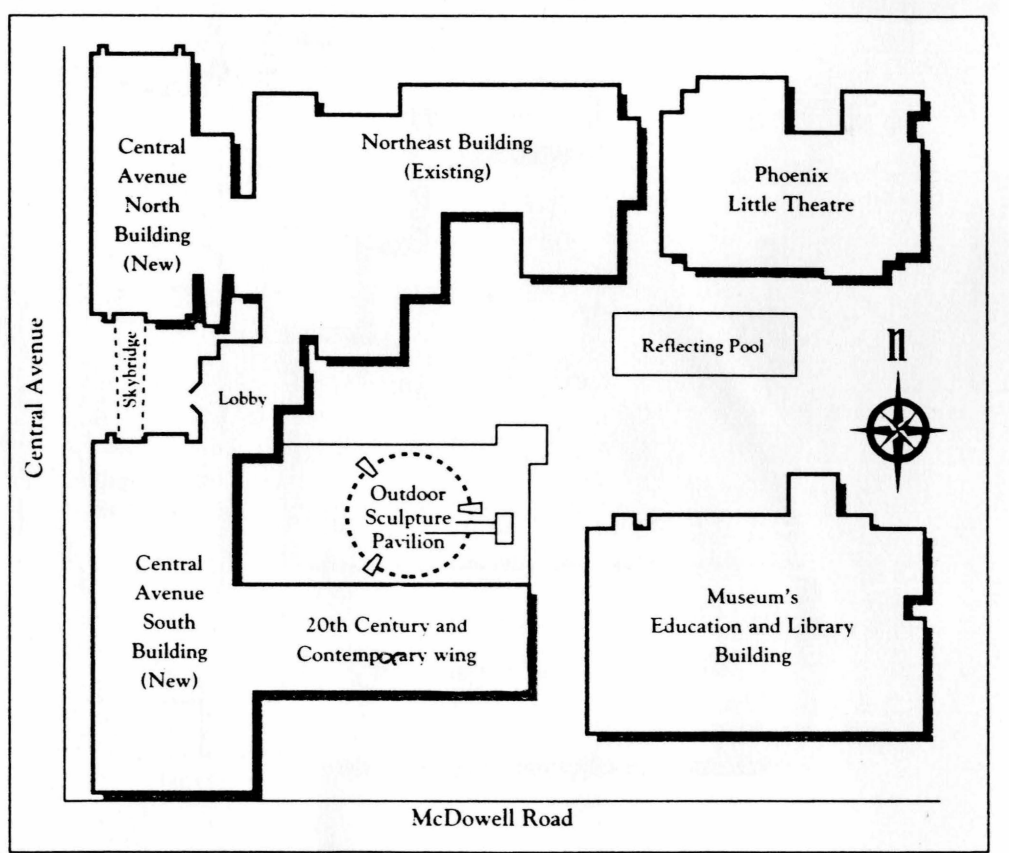


Figure 19. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Expansion plan.

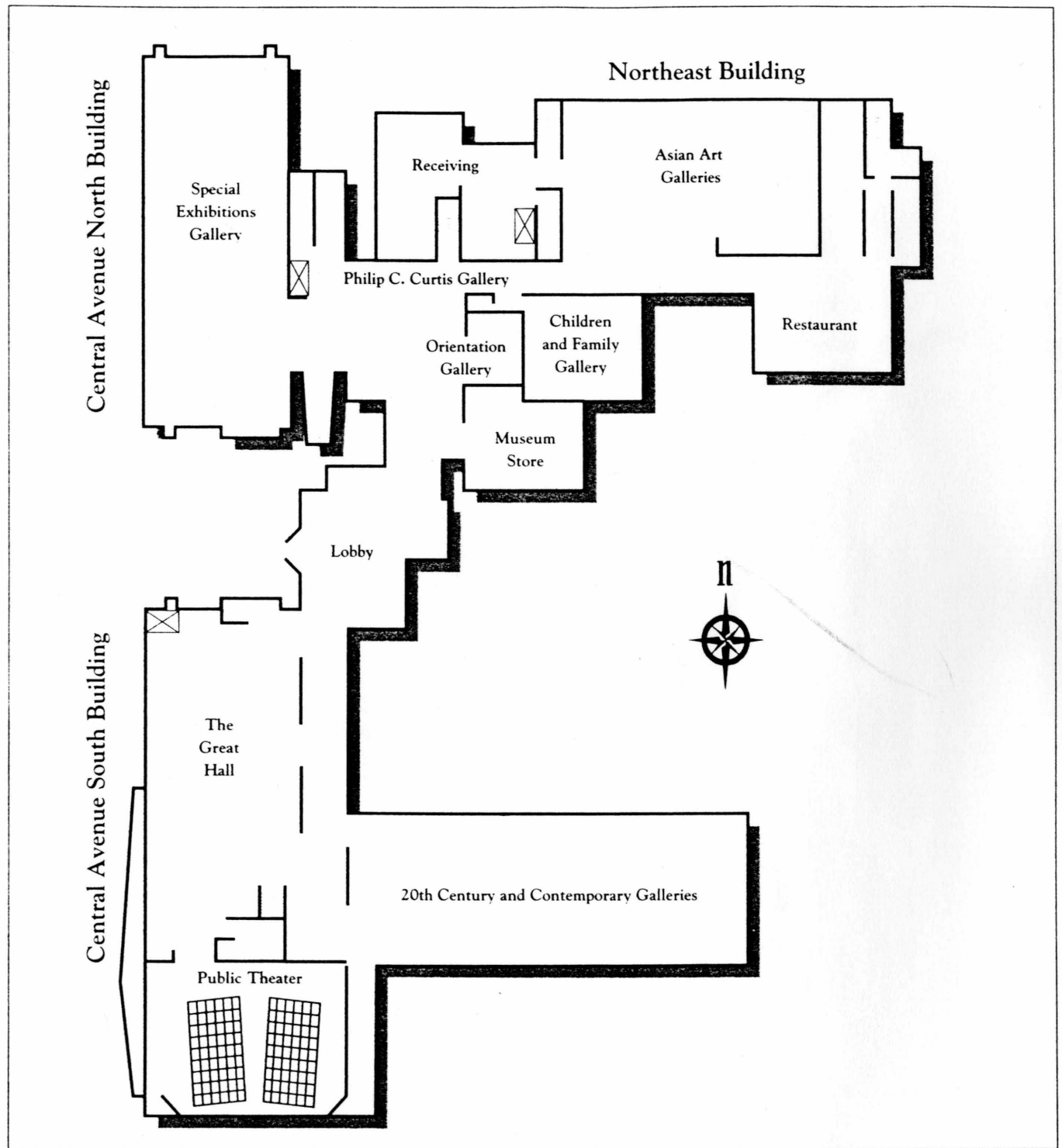


Figure 20. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Expansion plan for main level of galleries.

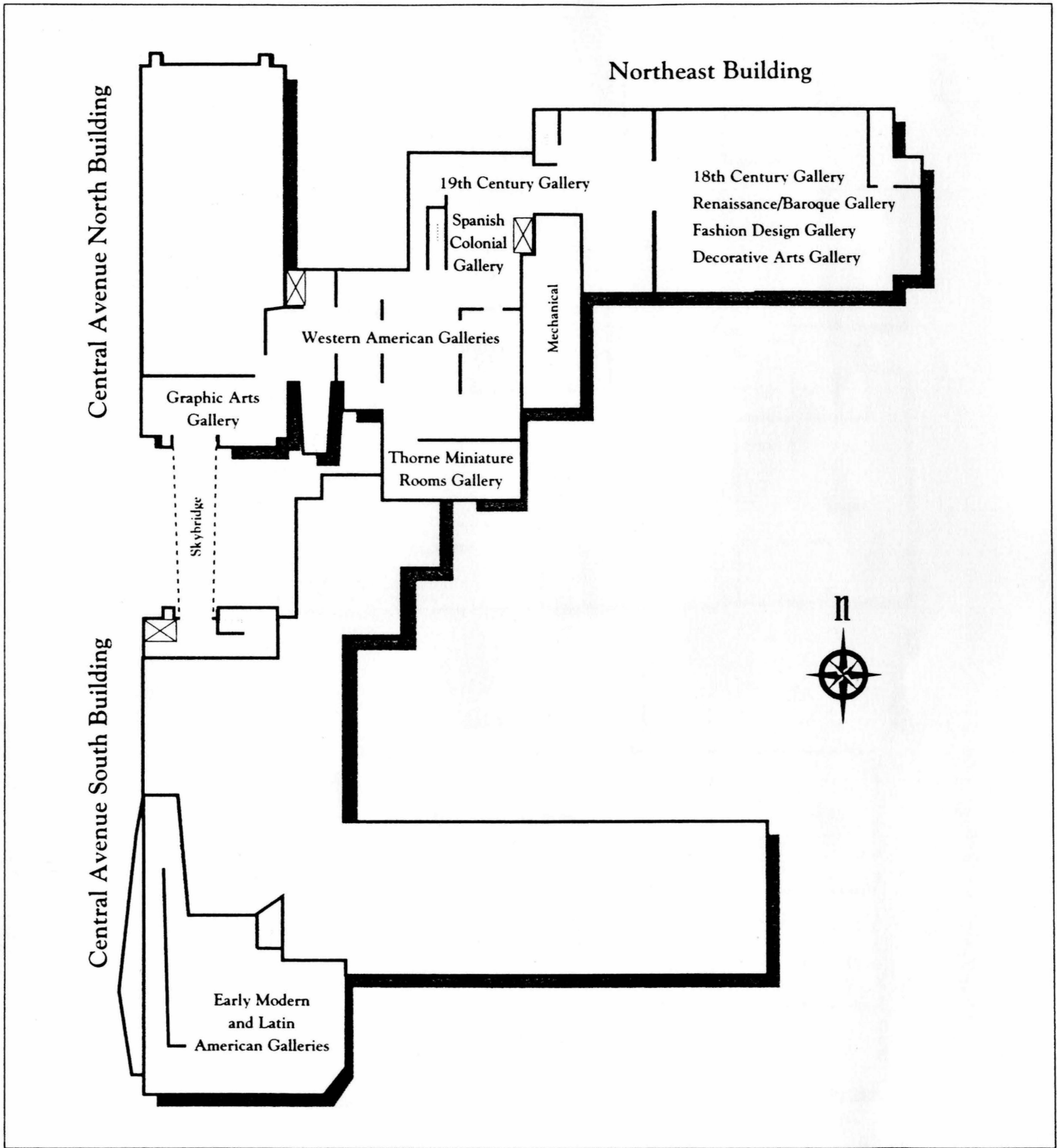


Figure 21. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Expansion plan for second level of galleries.

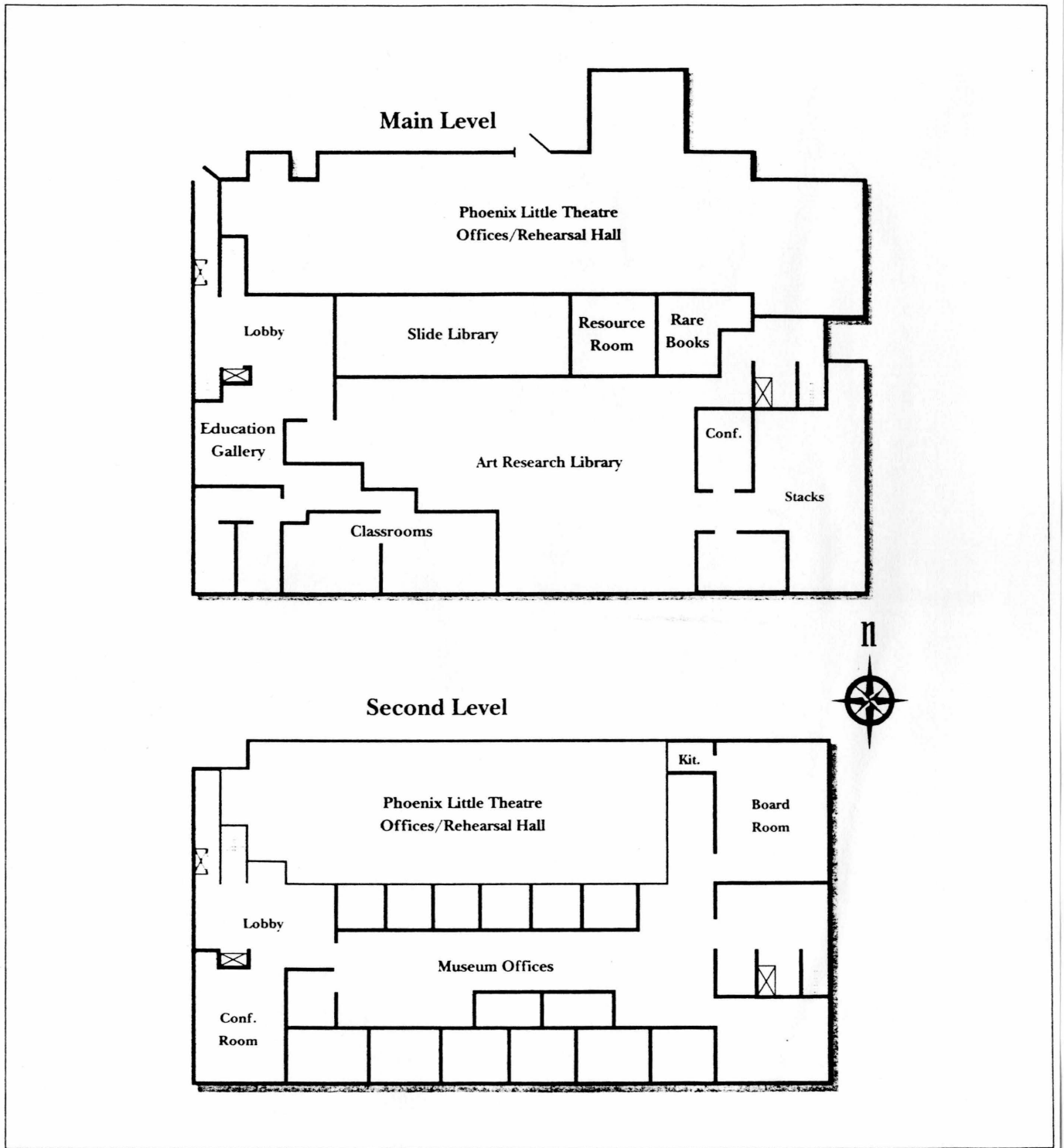


Figure 22. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Expansion plan for education and library building.

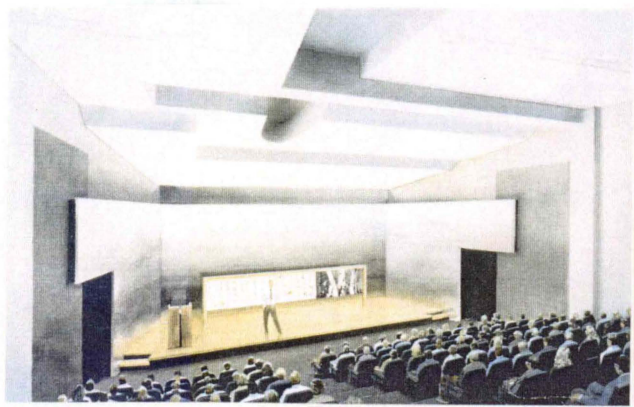


Figure 23. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Public Theatre.



Figure 24. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Interior of Great Hall.

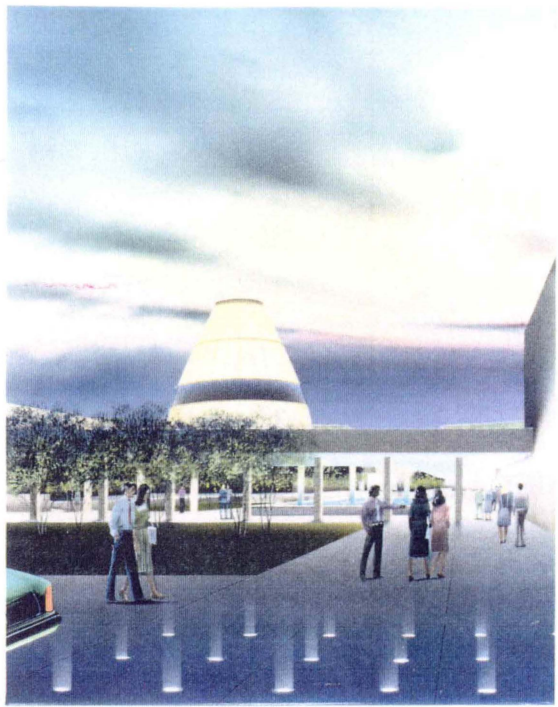


Figure 25. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix Ariz. View of the Outdoor Sculpture Pavilion.



PHOENIX ART MUSEUM, PHOENIX LITTLE THEATRE

LESCHER AND MAHONEY DLR Group, TOD WILLIAMS BILLIE TRIEN AND ASSOCIATES

Figure 26. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. View of the Central Avenue Museum Building.

outdoor sculpture pavilion. The tower is constructed to cool the pavilion with temperature drops between 12 and 40 degrees. Given the climate of Phoenix, this should prove to be one of the most popular aspects of the new museum.

The total building project will cost close to \$20 million. The architects are Lescher and Mahoney Architects and Engineers from Phoenix and Tod Williams Billie Tsien and Associates from New York. The exterior of the museum (Fig. 26) will be clad in pre-cast concrete with green quartzite. The bridge connecting the two wings will be constructed of stainless steel. The exterior is designed to blend with the desert landscape.

The museum is only one of the many architectural projects taking place in Phoenix. A new history museum, science museum and library are part of an entire building project for downtown Phoenix. The Phoenix Public Library, which is under construction just down the street from the Phoenix Art Museum, also complements its desert surroundings with a copper exterior. At a total cost of \$175 million, the new buildings reflect the concentrated effort made by the city of Phoenix to improve its downtown cultural center.

As expansion of the Phoenix Art Museum is underway, the museum is also beginning to change. Coinciding with the overall effort of Phoenix to improve its cultural presence, the Phoenix Art Museum prepares to open in the spring of 1996 with even greater visibility in the art world. Director James Ballinger predicts that the museum will continue to focus on education and the regional

strengths of the museum.⁶⁴ Being a larger museum will undoubtedly open new opportunities for the museum on a national level, but the museum plans to continue focusing on its regional strengths. Western art still proves a favored highlight of the museum's collection, as does the unique contemporary collection, which focuses specifically on artists currently working in the Southwest. The contemporary collection proves especially interesting in examining the possible ways to organize and display the collection in the new building.

grow in scholarship, allowing the museum to purchase twentieth century art and support now emerging artists. Furtz arrived in 1985 and continued to focus on the regional artistic strengths in the Southwest until his resignation in 1994. He curated both traveling exhibitions of national significance and permanent exhibitions for Phoenix such as the Triennial. Overall, Furtz helped to heighten awareness about artists working in the Southwest. This strong regional focus is clearly evident in the nature of objects on display.

Furtz used funds from the Contemporary Forum and the museum to actively seek out pieces created by Southwestern artists. One section of the twentieth century gallery featured a room with five objects produced by artists working in Los Angeles in the 1960's. The pieces included: Robert Irwin's *Unfilled Disc* (1969), Billy Al Bengtson's *Indon Vif* (1967), Edward Ruscha's *High-Speed Garden* (1968-69), Craig Kaufman's *My Red Hat* (1967-68) and James Thurman's *Great Wide Plain with Major Alignments* (1986). Though

⁶⁴Director of the Phoenix Art Museum James Ballinger, interview by author, 27 December 1994, Phoenix, Ariz., Phoenix Art Museum.

VII. The Phoenix Art Museum's Contemporary Collection under Bruce Kurtz

The Contemporary Gallery as it exists today follows an organizational plan arranged by the former Curator of Twentieth Century Art, Bruce Kurtz. Well-known for his Warhol, Haring, Disney show of 1991, Kurtz helped build the Contemporary Collection. During his nine years at the Phoenix Art Museum, the Contemporary Forum grew in membership, allowing the museum to purchase twentieth century art and support new emerging artists. Kurtz arrived in 1985 and continued to focus on the regional artistic strengths in the Southwest until his resignation in 1994. He curated both traveling exhibitions of national significance and important exhibitions for Phoenix such as the Triennial. Overall, Kurtz hoped to heighten awareness about artists working in the Southwest. This strong regional focus is clearly evident in the choice of objects on display.

Kurtz used funds from the Contemporary Forum and the museum to actively seek out pieces created by Southwestern artists. One section of the Twentieth Century Gallery featured a room with five objects produced by artists working in Los Angeles in the 1960's. The pieces included: Robert Irwin's *Untitled Disc* (1969), Billy Al Bengston's *Dodge City* (1961), Edward Ruscha's *High-Speed Gardening* (1986-87), Craig Kauffman's *Ruby Red Untitled* (1967-68) and James Turrell's *Crater Site Plan with Major Alignments* (1986). Though Ruscha's and Turrell's pieces date from the 1980's, the two

artists were working in Los Angeles in the sixties. In fact all five artists were part of a group that knew each other, often worked together, and shared the same gallery. It was, in part, their activities that helped win recognition for Los Angeles as a vital west coast art center.

By giving these artists their own room in the gallery, Kurtz affirmed their position in the history of twentieth century art. Just as the artists themselves desired proper artistic attention, so, too, Kurtz wanted the Phoenix Art Museum to single out this artistic flourishing as a significant movement in art history. The story Kurtz supported recognized and highlighted the artistic achievement of these artists. In separating these five objects from the rest of the contemporary collection, Kurtz clearly made a subjective decision. He chose to focus particularly on artists working in the Southwest, which fit with his overall goal of increasing awareness about art produced in Phoenix's regional area, and he asserted that their importance was national in its impact.

However, the objects alone do not always sufficiently tell the story. Kurtz included extended object labels for four of the five objects. Only Kauffman's piece had merely a descriptive object label. The labels provided information about the artist and the artistic movement in the sixties. The labels also drew connections among the five artists, mentioning specific projects they worked on together. With the drawing of Turrell's Roden Crater project, the label explained the location, which is in Arizona, and the idea behind Turrell's work. Irwin's label commented specifically on the

projects both he and Turrell worked on together, showing the connection between the two men. Bengston's label explained his connection to Jasper Johns' "Targets" and Pop Art. Ruscha's label specifically mentioned the fact that he was working on word paintings in the sixties. With the help of these labels, the museum visitor could understand something of the vital artistic movement going on in Los Angeles at the time.

Kurtz also gave a gallery talk on highlights from the Contemporary Collection and chose to feature Irwin's *Untitled Disc*, Bengston's *Dodge City*, Ruscha's *High-Speed Gardening* and Turrell's *Crater Site Plan*. The written transcript of Kurtz' talk was available in the library for docents' use. Here again he consciously chose to emphasize certain works in the collection. In his talk, Kurtz explained the connections between the artists, especially their interaction at the Ferus Gallery. In describing Bengston's *Dodge City*, which was part of *The Sergeant Stripe* paintings, Kurtz said, "In 1962 these paintings were shown in the Ferus Gallery, that was Billy Al Bengston's gallery, it was the gallery of Edward Ruscha and most of the other important California artists including Robert Irwin."⁶⁵

By setting the premise that these California artists were important, Kurtz influenced docents also to give guided tours of this room in the Contemporary Gallery. During the summer of 1993, two docents gave talks on one or more of these artists. The first

⁶⁵Bruce Kurtz, "Masterworks of the Contemporary Collection," transcript of gallery talk (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, n.d.), 13.

was a Contemporary Gallery Talk given daily at 12:15 p.m., which discussed the Los Angeles artists and the growth of Los Angeles as an art center. The docent also mentioned the Ferus Gallery and the differences between the California artists and their New York contemporaries. She stressed the importance of freeways in Ruscha's painting which features the words "High-Speed Gardening" depicted as if the viewer were rushing by a sign along the freeway. The incorporation of script was not a new idea, but Ruscha played with elements particularly relevant to the Southern California environment. The painting addressed both the "High-Speed" of the freeways, with everything viewed at an accelerated rate which blurs images, and the lush, green landscape of Southern California, which permits "Gardening."

Kurtz had pointed out similar ideas in his tour as well. He recognized the influence of such artists as Jasper Johns and of Pop Art in general, yet Kurtz emphasized the difference between Pop Art in Los Angeles and New York. "But pop art[sic] in Los Angeles is different from pop art[sic] in New York partly because of the environment the artist lived in."⁶⁶ Kurtz attributed this difference to the automobile:

But also if you've ever lived in Los Angeles you know that an automobile is like the lifeline and the freeways are probably the most important architectural statement of Los Angeles and you spend a lot of time in your car and so the automobile is like an extension of your body. It's like your clothing and even more important to a lot of people than their house because they are seen in it so much it represents a manifestation of their personality and their status in life and so on.

⁶⁶Ibid, 11.

So automobiles are really quite a very major role in life in LA, because in New York, where I have friends who live in New York and grew up in New York, they don't know how to drive.⁶⁷

Kurtz maintained that the automobile directly influenced the artists' life-style. Driving in Southern California was an influential factor in these artists lives. He used the artist's environment as a basis to understand the art he produced. In the 1993 Triennial Kurtz concentrated on environment as a major influence on Southwestern art. Here again, the story that the curator chose as most important permeated the entire presentation of the collection.

As mentioned earlier, the docents gave tours which built upon and strengthened Kurtz' observations. The talk on the Los Angeles artists was a repeated tour in the museum's repertoire. The other talk, also a Midday, focused solely on the Turrell piece. The docent provided further information than what was possible on the extended label. Given that this was a drawing of the actual work and obviously not the physical crater, the piece often caused visitors to question its significance. The docent attempted to explain Turrell's background and the history of the project. With this piece it was especially important to offer additional information, because the drawing could not adequately convey the impact of the physical crater, nor Turrell's ideas about light and space. Again the fact that the crater exists in Arizona and that Turrell is now working in Arizona is relevant.

⁶⁷Ibid, 11-12.

As of January 1995, the five works just discussed were the only objects in the room. The room is located at the far east end of the rectangular-shaped Twentieth Century Gallery (Fig. 27) and separated from the rest of the gallery by a partial wall. Irwin's disc (Figs. 28 & 29) hangs as the only piece on the north wall, with the four necessary spotlights placed strategically in both the upper and lower left and right corners to create the desired effect of four overlapping circular shadows immediately behind the acrylic disc. Directly in front of Irwin's disc rests the one and only bench in the room. The single disc presents a clear focus to the seated visitor.

If the visitor were to turn around and to sit facing the south wall, he or she would have seen Kauffman's *Ruby Red Untitled*. The piece was the only object actually on the wall, but the work still had to share the space with the opening into the Spanish Colonial Room. This shared focus of attention reduced the impact of Kauffman's shiny plastic object. The dramatic impression produced by the single disc on the north did not exist for the Kauffman piece.

Along the east wall were the works by Bengston (Fig. 30) and Ruscha (Fig. 31) which were also visible from the rest of the Contemporary Gallery. The connections between these two artists who reacted to Pop Art in New York and the environmental factors particular to Los Angeles make it appropriate that their two paintings should be grouped together. The physical proximity of the actual paintings enhanced the possible associations between the

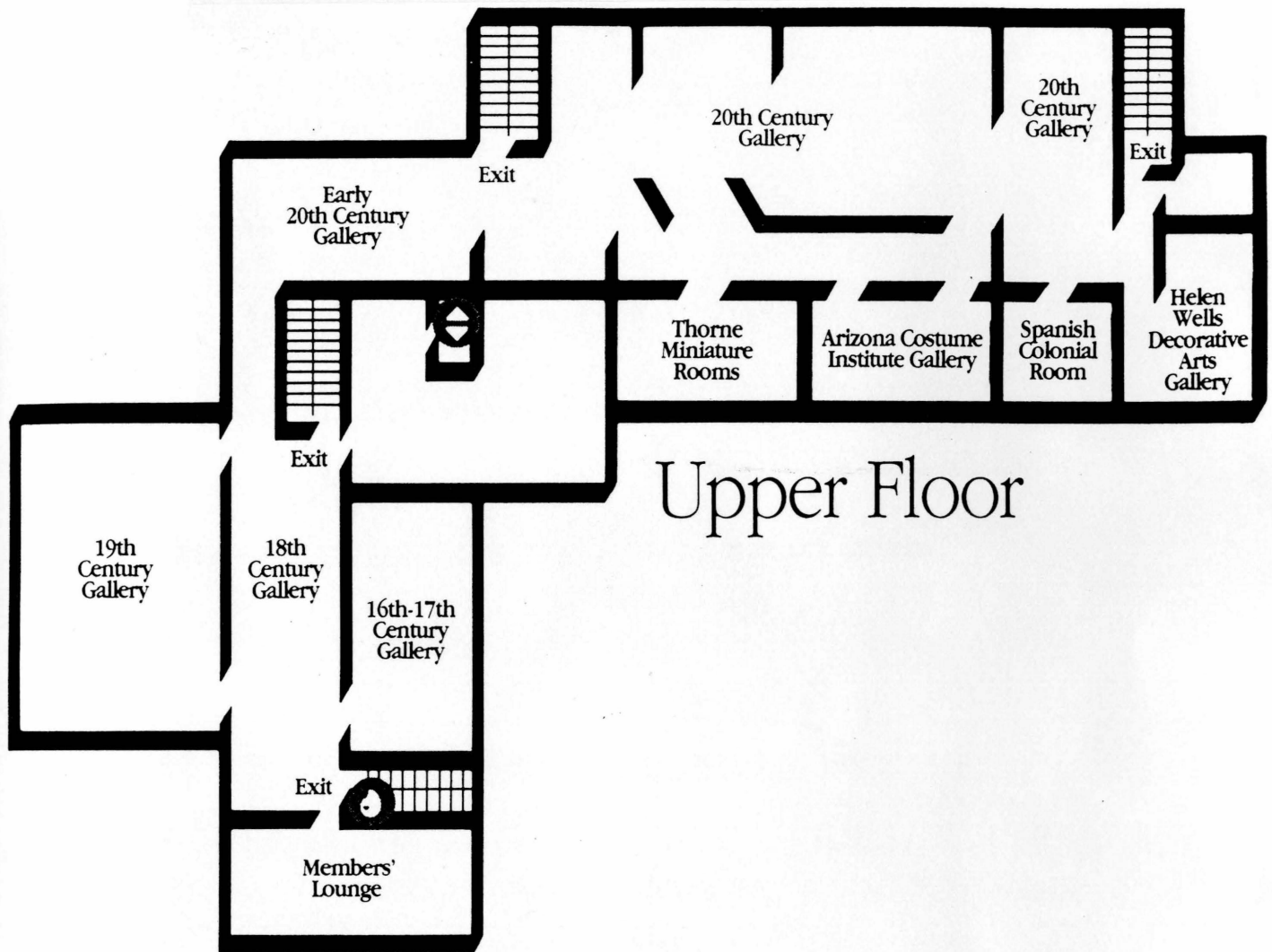


Figure 27. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. Second level gallery plan.

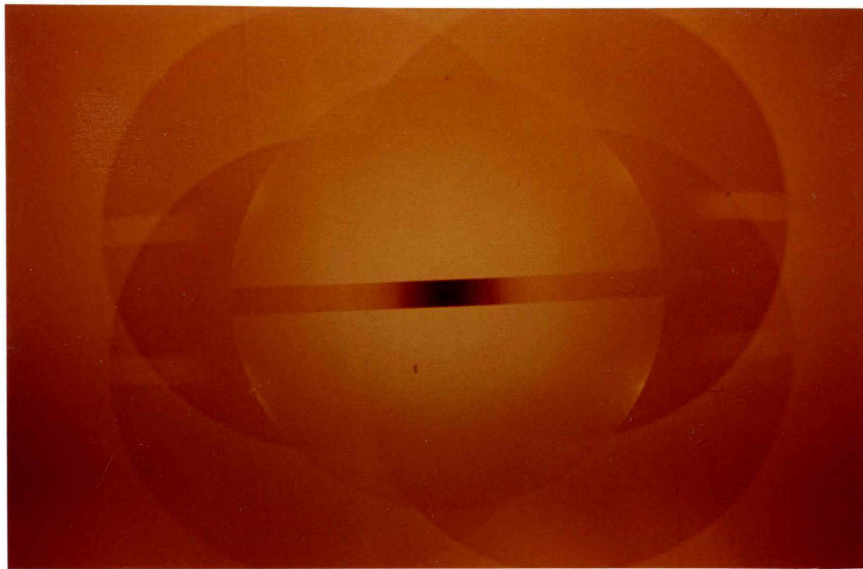


Figure 28. Untitled Disc, 1969, Robert Irwin.

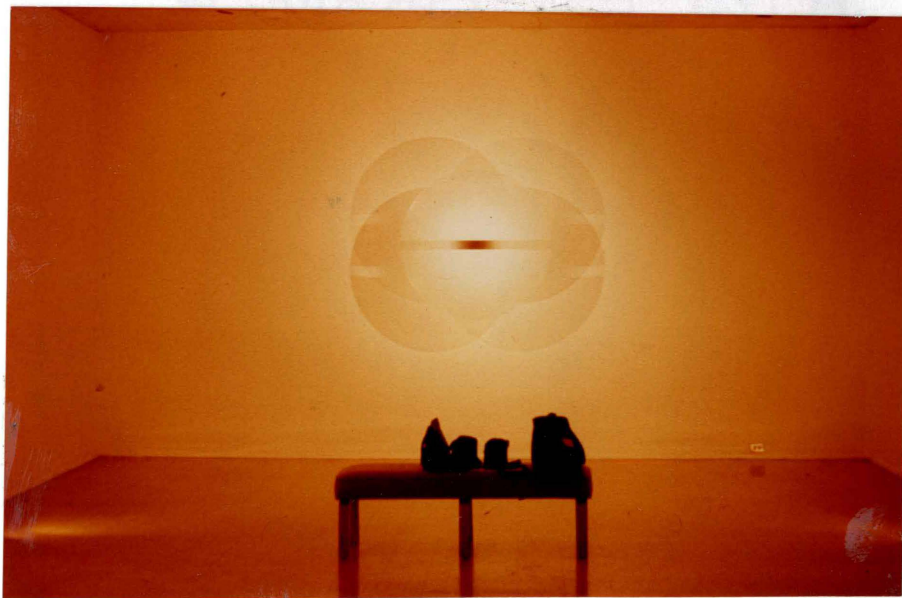


Figure 29. Untitled Disc, 1969, Robert Irwin.

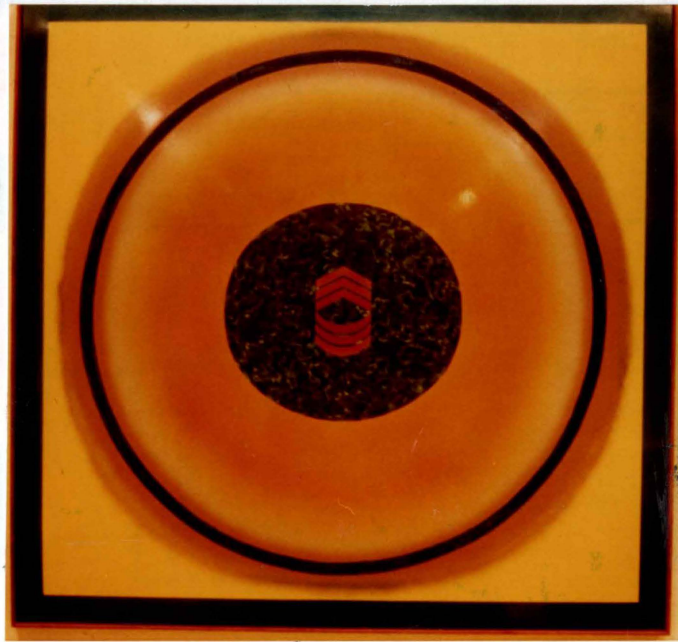


Figure 30. Dodge City, 1961, Billy Al Bengston.

of the two half-walks.

Finally, the Turrell drawing related to the next walk, the one with the smallest wall space. This was appropriate since the drawing



Figure 31. High-Speed Gardening, 1986-87, Edward Ruscha.

artists and their works.

Finally the Turrell drawing rested on the west wall which is the smallest wall space. This was appropriate since the drawing requires close examination. Nestled in the corner, near the adjacent south wall, the drawing existed in a more intimate setting. A visitor could easily approach it for a closer investigation and a better understanding of the work. As opposed to Irwin's piece which relies on the effect produced by the actual disc, Turrell's drawing functions more as a sketch of a larger idea.

The five works not only represent a unit, as the work of California artists, but they also all relate to the theme of environment. Thus Kurtz' presentation of their works served his goal of focusing on the importance of Southwestern art and its unique characteristics, while at the same time asserting the national character of the work and implying that it deserved more attention than it had hitherto been accorded. He was re-writing contemporary art history.

In his attempt to recognize Southwestern artists, he wanted Phoenix and its museum to achieve national prominence in the arts. By highlighting artists from the Southwest, Kurtz emphasized artists who would not ordinarily receive similar attention in art museums in other cities. In asserting the museum's artistic merit, Kurtz showed his focus on regional artists who demonstrated the artistic strength of the Southwest.

Although necessary in the earlier stages of the Phoenix Art

VIII. The Phoenix Art Museum's Contemporary Collection under David Rubin

With Bruce Kurtz' resignation in March 1994 and David Rubin's arrival as his replacement in November 1994, the Twentieth Century Gallery has undergone inevitable changes in the presentation of its collection. As the new Curator of Twentieth Century Art, David Rubin joined the Phoenix Art Museum during its expansion. The situation of the Phoenix Art Museum in 1994 was hardly comparable to the situation in 1985 when Kurtz arrived as Curator. Nine years had passed and in those nine years, new perspectives on the history of art had arisen. Thus the mere passing of nine years, along with the arrival of a new curator, with his own ideas, was bound to influence the organization and display of the Contemporary Collection.

The issues that Kurtz faced are not the same issues that Rubin encounters. Kurtz was dealing with a younger museum, still in the process of establishing itself as a significant art museum. In his attempts to recognize Southwestern artists, he wanted Phoenix and its museum to achieve national prominence in the arts. By highlighting artists from the Southwest, Kurtz emphasized artists who would not necessarily achieve similar attention in art museums in other cities. In asserting the museum's artistic merit, Kurtz chose to focus on regional artists who demonstrated the artistic strength of the Southwest.

Although necessary in the earlier stages of the Phoenix Art

Museum's history, the need to affirm its artistic excellence is not the primary concern of the museum today. With a major expansion underway that will more than double the museum's space, the Phoenix Art Museum's staff need not worry that its role as a serious art institution will be questioned. The curator no longer needs to highlight the art produced in the Southwest. David Rubin is free to pursue different organizing principles. As curator, he can choose to focus on a different story, one that does not separate Southwestern artists from the larger art historical lineage. Given the museum's present expansion and growth, Rubin's choices for the Twentieth Century Collection will undoubtedly lead in a new direction.

David Rubin came to the Phoenix Art Museum from the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art. As Associate Director and Chief Curator for the Cleveland Center, he curated such shows as "Cruciformed: Images of the Cross Since 1980," which featured the controversial work of Andres Serrano, notorious for his crucifix in urine, and "Old Glory: The American Flag in Contemporary Art," which included examples of flag burnings and flag stompings. Rubin does not shy away from potentially controversial exhibitions and maintained that "he presented the show in such a way that the art could be understood as an expression of their times rather than the political view of the museum that presented them."⁶⁸

Rubin has plans for future exhibitions at the Phoenix Art

⁶⁸Richard Nilsen, "20th-Century Curator Hired by Art Museum," The Arizona Republic, 16 October 1994, F4.

Museum. He wants to organize a show which focuses on art of the twentieth Century from World War I to the present and also one which examines the "impact of technology on twentieth century art, from Futurism through Virtual Reality."⁶⁹ Rubin believes communication is the key factor in a museum exhibition. As he stated, "If you're not communicating then what's the point of art?"⁷⁰ His primary concern is that the exhibition stimulates thought in the viewer, and he is willing to accept controversy if it means the visitor responded to the show. He has said, "I've never cared if everyone likes all the art we show. If they have no response at all, then I worry. I want people to reflect on what they've seen in a show."⁷¹

Rubin's general principle for looking at twentieth century art is "from a 21st century perspective."⁷² As Curator of Twentieth Century Art for the Phoenix Art Museum in the end-of-the-twentieth century period, David Rubin has the advantage of perspective. The perception of art and specifically contemporary art is constantly changing, and Rubin's additional nine-year advantage over his predecessor makes quite a difference. Nine years later what was new in the art world has joined the art historical continuum. The art produced in the eighties can be evaluated in reference not only

⁶⁹David S. Rubin, "From the New Curator," Contemporary Forum Newsletter, Winter 1995.

⁷⁰Nilsen, F4.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Rubin.

to what happened beforehand, but can also be compared to other art produced at the same time and to the art that came afterward. The art of the eighties fits into a larger picture of the art that influenced it and the art it influenced. Rubin can, therefore, make decisions about the presentation of the collection based on this knowledge. He knows more of the history of the art and can choose to tell a different story than the one Kurtz told.

In looking at the actual choice of objects displayed in the Twentieth Century Gallery and the manner in which they are presented, it is clear that Rubin is telling a different story. Due to the expansion, there was no urgent need for Rubin to rehang the permanent Twentieth Century Collection. The works, as they now appear in the gallery, will only remain in this building until June 1995 before all the objects are moved to storage and then eventually rehung in the new buildings. Rubin has arrived at a transitional stage, where the fruition of his plans for the Contemporary Collection will not appear until the museum opens completely in the Spring of 1996. Therefore his choice for the presentation of the collection will be reflected in the new building. His ideas will govern the decisions made for the organization of space in the new Contemporary Gallery. Here he will be responsible for presenting the works and educating the public in the manner he finds most successful.

However, Rubin has had to make decisions about the collection now. He cannot wait until 1996 to implement his ideas about the contemporary collection and the message it should impart to its

visitors. Because three works were loaned to the museum for three months, Rubin had to find a place in the contemporary gallery for them. He had to consider the safety of the objects and at the same time wanted to make associations between them.⁷³ He chose to put them together, but to do this, he had to remove some of the pieces previously displayed in the gallery. In the semi-enclosed room at the east end of the Contemporary Gallery, he removed the works by Kauffman, Ruscha and Turrell and replaced them with works by Roy Lichtenstein and Joan Miro. In doing this, he unintentionally changed the focus of the room from one solely representing Southern California artists to one portraying international artists.

The message of the room changes with the different objects displayed. No longer does the visitor enter the room and understand, through the works themselves and their accompanying labels, that all the artists worked together in Los Angeles in the sixties. The associations made by Rubin produce another understanding. Rubin's hanging creates a different context in which to view the works displayed. He has unconsciously changed the story the room tells.

Two of the works remain from the earlier hanging, Irwin's *Untitled* disc and Bengston's *Dodge City*. The new works include Lichtenstein's *I...I'm Sorry* (1966) and *Nude with Pyramid* (1994) and Miro's *La Caresse d'un Oiseau* (1967). With two of the new works dating from the sixties and Lichtenstein's later painting

⁷³David S. Rubin, Curator of 20th Century Art at the Phoenix Art Museum, interview by author, 10 March 1995, Lexington, Va., phone conversation.

done in the same "comic book" style, the focus of the room can still claim a sixties perspective. Yet, with the addition of a New York Pop Artist and a French Surrealist, the total effect of the room changes. It is a much broader look at the art produced in the sixties which includes the west and east coast art centers of Los Angeles and New York and the international art center of Paris. Whereas Kurtz separated the art produced in Los Angeles from that created in New York, Rubin brings them together. Kurtz dealt with New York only in reference to Southern California, while Rubin looks at the two places together. Kurtz produced a room which heralded the emerging artistic talents in Southern California in the sixties. Rubin gives the viewer an understanding of the artistic relevance of the Los Angeles artists in relation to their national and international contemporaries.

Although he added the Lichtenstein and Miro works to the room, Rubin, as of February 1995, has not included any extended labels to accompany the new objects. Given the fact that the works are on temporary loan this is not too surprising, but, nevertheless, it still alters the room. Kurtz had extended labels on all but Kauffman's *Ruby Red Untitled* which clearly enumerated the connections between the artists in the room. Rubin does not directly tell the viewer the associations between the artists in the room. He gives no clues as to why these artist are grouped together and leaves the viewer free to make his or her own conclusions. The only extended labels which remain are left from Kurtz' installation. These labels mention the connections between

Irwin and Turrell, which do not fit with the present choice of works, and refer to the associations between Bengston and New York Pop art, which does relate to the Lichtenstein pieces. However, the connections between Bengston's *Dodge City* and Lichtenstein's paintings are not obvious from the label. The Bengston label tells the viewer about the technique of paint application which hides any visible man-made efforts, but there is no label which describes Lichtenstein's painting process, which is similar. Although both artists aimed at achieving the invisibility of the artistic hand at work, this similarity escapes the novice. Without the help of written explanations, the visitor must rely solely on the physical presentation of the space. The visitor must become an active viewer if he or she is to gain an understanding of the connections between these artists and of the motivating force behind their placement.

The physical design of the room still includes the same wall structures as the Kurtz installation. Joan Miro's *La Caresse d'un Oiseau* (Fig. 32) stands as a sculpture where Edward Ruscha's *High-Speed Gardening* used to hang. This large work is clearly visible from the opposite end of the larger gallery. Painted in bright colors, red, yellow and green, the sculpture stands out sharply against the white wall. Placed next to Billy Al Bengston's *Dodge City*, the two works visually complement each other in the similar choice of colors, though Bengston's are more subdued in tone. Roy Lichtenstein's *I...I'm Sorry* (Fig. 33) hangs in the former place of Craig Kauffman's *Ruby Red Untitled* and to the viewer's right, in

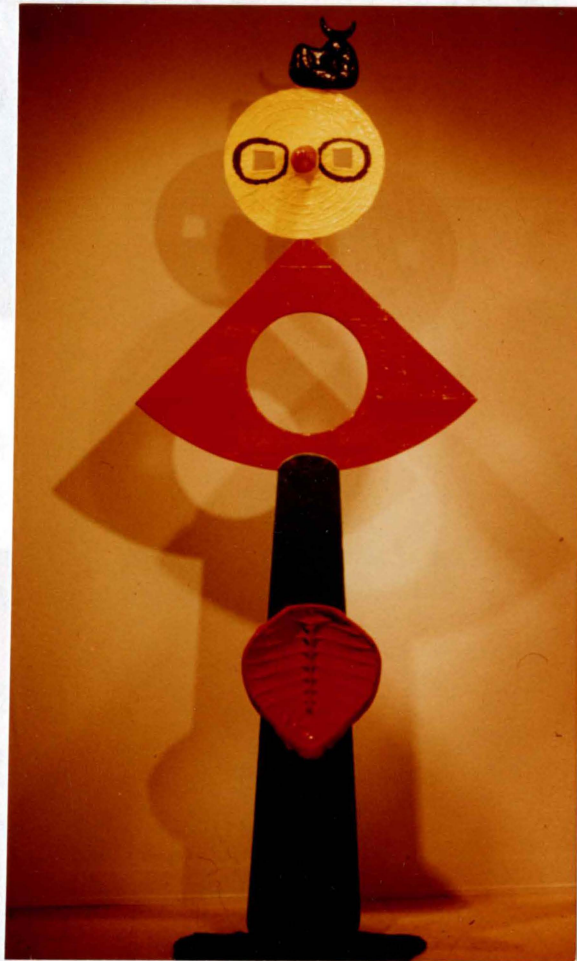


Figure 32. La Caresse d'un Oiseau, 1967, Joan Miro.



Figure 33. I...I'm Sorry, 1966, Roy Lichtenstein.



Figure 34. Nude with Pyramid, 1994, Roy Lichtenstein.

the corner, hangs Lichtenstein's *Nude with Pyramid*. (Fig. 34) Lichtenstein used bright reds, blues, and yellows for *I...I'm Sorry*, which make the painting visually related to the Miro sculpture which stands near it. *Nude with Pyramid* shows more muted colors of the same palette. The similar colors again link the paintings visually. Also the inclusion of two Lichtensteins makes for clear comparisons between the two.

Rubin has kept the number of pieces in the room at five and has used the space in the same way as Kurtz, placing the new objects in the same locations as the previous installation. However, by adding and subtracting certain works, he has altered the room completely. The pieces he kept, Irwin's and Bengston's, have a different context in the new environment. Rubin has given the old and new pieces a new context in which to view them. He has changed the story or at least refocused it to include a broader representation.

The installation is temporary, as the expansion forces the inevitable relocation of the collection, but nevertheless it is important in establishing the change in stories being told at the Phoenix Art Museum. A new curator naturally alters a collection, emphasizing the ideas he supports. A new museum, likewise, changes its focus with its new building. With more space and new galleries, Rubin will undoubtedly tell a different story than the one possible in the old gallery.

IX. The Larger Rooms of the Contemporary Gallery at the Phoenix Art Museum

Stepping out of the enclosed room at the far east end of the Twentieth Century Gallery, the visitor encounters a larger room which contains the majority of the contemporary collection. The basic shape of the gallery is rectangular and extends toward the west. The gallery is divided by four partial walls. Two of them are perpendicular to the northern wall and are free standing. The other two separate the southern hall-shaped section from the rest of the gallery. None of the four walls, however, separate the sections of the larger gallery as completely as the enclosed room.

Overall, the broken walls make it difficult to gain a clear sense of the organization of the room. Entering the gallery, a visitor does not know where to begin to look. No clear path exists. Instead the viewer is in an undefined space, which does lend itself to privacy. While the smaller room at the east end evoked a feeling of intimate contact with the objects, the larger room seems overwhelming. The visitor weaves in and out of spaces formed by the dividing walls, with no clear sense as to the purpose of the divisions. Some works are hidden in obscure places and tucked away in corners. Other pieces hang in spaces that seem too small or too large for the paintings.

The actual works themselves differ from each other. There are no obvious connections between the content or the artists. The largest of the rooms (Fig. 35) holds twelve pieces ranging from



Figure 35. Large room in Contemporary Gallery.



Figure 36. Feeding the Dogs, 1986, David Bates.

David Bates' *Feeding the Dogs* (1986) (Fig. 36) to Lucas Samaras' *Untitled Box Number 33* (1965). (Fig. 37) Both painting and sculpture are present. The paintings include such large works as Derek Boshier's *Night Row* (1985). (Fig 38) The sculpture ranges in size from large works resting on the floor like Robert Arneson's *Stream Ahead* (1974) (Fig. 39) to small pieces mounted on the wall, such as Samaras' *Untitled Box*. The sheer diversity of the art in this room presents a potential problem for the viewer.

The long hallway-shaped area to the south of this large room also displays a disjointed group of objects. At one end of the hall hangs Lee Bontecou's *Untitled* (1961) (Fig. 40); at the other end rests Mark Rothko's *Untitled* (1968). (Fig. 41) Besides the similar title and the 1960's date, the pieces have little to do with one another. Bontecou's piece resembles a menacing eye, staring down the hall. Rothko's painting hangs with other paintings by artists working in his era. It lies between Willem de Kooning's *Woman in Pool* (1968) and Josef Albers' earlier work *Homage to the Square* (1953). Other artists nearby in the room include: Hans Hoffman's *Untitled* (1947) and Mark Tobey's *Untitled (White Writing)* (1957). All these artists except Albers are associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement. So their presence in the southwestern corner of the room suggests a unit, but they do not relate to the other seven works in the hall.

The fourth section of the Contemporary Gallery contains six pieces. This area is formed by the dividing walls at the far west end of the gallery. Helen Frankenthaler *Lush Spring* (1975) (Fig.



Figure 37. Untitled Box Number 33, 1965, Lucas Samaras.



Figure 38. Night Row, 1985, Derek Boshier.



Figure 39. Stream Ahead, 1974, Robert Arneson.



Figure 40. Untitled, 1961, Lee Bontecou.

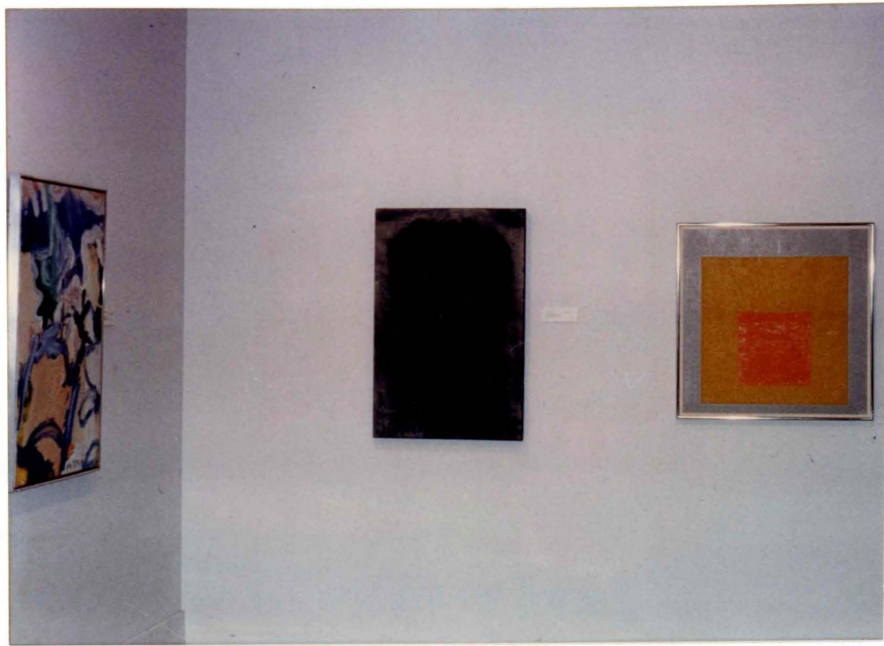


Figure 41. Untitled, 1968, Mark Rothko.



Figure 42. Lush Spring, 1975, Helen Frankenthaler.

42) dominates the north wall in this room. Her large painting occupies most of the wall space and makes for a clear focus of the room. A bench in front of *Lush Spring* provides opportunity for greater attention. Another large piece included in this room is Jose Bedia's *Isla Juganda a la Guerra (Isla Playing at War)* (1992). (Fig. 43) It hangs across from Frankenthaler's painting. Aside from the similarity in size, there seems no clear reason for their grouping. Also included in this area is Wayne Thiebaud's *Four Ice Cream Cones* (1964). (Fig. 44) The range of depictions includes an abstract landscape, a social commentary on war, and a portrait of food.

Unlike the room containing the Irwin and Bengston, the other sections in the gallery do not hold together as a cohesive unit. The pieces are grouped without explanation and there are few extended labels. Of the thirty objects in the gallery, only two pieces have commentary, David Bates' *Feeding the Dogs* and Jose Bedia's *Isla Juganda a la Guerra*. In the Southern California artists room, four of the five objects had extended labels.

Written explanations are extremely important in helping the viewer, especially the novice, to understand the context of the works. Without labels, the visitor is left to guess why the objects appear together. Curators have varied opinions about the use of extended labels. Some fear the labels will detract from the object, inviting the viewer to read instead of look. Charles Lang Freer was one person who, in the earlier part of the century, believed that art of any kind, both of Asian and Western cultures,



Figure 43. Isla Juganda a la Guerra (Isla Playing at War), 1992, Jose Bedia.



Figure 44. Four Ice Cream Cones, 1964, Wayne Thiebaud.

exists on a "far, harmonious plane and can be appreciated on purely aesthetic and mystical grounds without cultural background."⁷⁴ He would have opposed interpretive labels.

Most education departments would disagree. Research on the effectiveness of labels has shown that visitors do in fact read the labels and are more likely to spend an extended period with the art when labels are present. A study at the Franklin Institute Science Museum found that:

During the course of a museum visit, visitors will simply browse through most exhibit halls, but will also come upon one or more exhibits that hold their attention, in which they spend a significantly longer time and read more labels.⁷⁵

The visitor may not read every label, but he or she does read the labels that accompany the objects they find interesting. In fact, the study found that "during the course of an average two- to three-hour visit, they do, in fact, read an average of 68 percent of the labels on the displays at which they stop."⁷⁶

The label complements the object and provides information that the object alone cannot supply. The caution for curators is to moderate what and how much information is included on the label. As the Freer's Japanese Art Curator Ann Yonemura stated, the fear is that visitors will "read their way through the museum and not

⁷⁴Amy E. Schwartz, "The Well-Written Label," The Washington Post, 15 June 1993, A21.

⁷⁵Minda Borun and Maryanne Miller, "To Label or Not to Label?," Museum News (March/April 1980): 65.

⁷⁶Ibid., 67.

remember seeing anything."⁷⁷

At the Phoenix Art Museum the individual curators of the various collections write their own labels and then give them to the Curator of Education to edit before mounting them in the galleries. No "universal voice" exists for all the labels in the museum, but there is some continuity in format. Certain items usually appear. For example the labels in the small room devoted to the Southern California artists gave insight into the artistic techniques and how they were revolutionary. The labels explained why the works were innovative and therefore what made them important. They included the artist's quotes. They also offered a brief introduction to Pop Art and its subsequent influence on the artists represented. The labels, as in Turrell's case, explained what the viewer was seeing and the meaning behind the object. Most importantly, the labels raised questions to stimulate the viewer into being an active participant.

The Phoenix Art Museum uses other labels besides extended object labels to communicate with its visitors. In the room holding the California artists, there were labels about "Art of the Twentieth Century" and "The Challenges and Rewards of Contemporary Art." The "Art of the Twentieth Century" label hung between the Kauffman and Turrell pieces originally and now is between the two Lichtensteins. The label uses quotes to explain how the world has changed in the twentieth century. It mentions the accomplishments of Freud and Einstein. The label also invites the viewer to:

⁷⁷Schwartz, A21.

Look in our installation of early twentieth century art for text panels titled *Realism*, *Surrealism* and *Abstraction* for further discussion of these three styles. The text panel titled *The Challenges and Rewards of Contemporary Art* discusses the unconventional ideas, materials and techniques of art in the second half of the twentieth century.

This invites the visitor to actively search for the other labels.

The "Contemporary Art" label hangs to the left of Irwin's disc. It assures the visitor that his or her individual impressions of the collection are valid. It states, "Discoveries can be made on you own." It also encourages questions and individual explanations with "the more you look, and the more questions you ask, the more insights will unfold." It continues, "You don't have to agree with everything the artist or label writers say." This gives the viewer freedom to make his or her own decisions.

The "Contemporary Art" label appears at both ends of the contemporary gallery, assuring that visitors entering from either end will have the opportunity to read it. The Twentieth Century Gallery also includes labels reminding the visitor not to touch the art objects. These labels include an explanation of the harm human contact can do. This is helpful, especially for children, who want to know why they cannot touch the pieces. Another interesting label gives a description of the object label. It tells what the information means and where it appears on the label. This helps those visitors who are curious about the information given and helps them understand the labels. It also draws attention to the educational role the museum plays in presenting objects.

The label will undoubtedly pose significant challenges for the curators as they plan for the new Phoenix Art Museum. Both Jan Krulick, Curator of Education, and David Rubin, Curator of Twentieth Century Art, say that wall labels with explanations of the collection will remain part of the museum's structure. Education will continue to dominate the museum's purpose. Concerning specifics about the physical hanging and design of the contemporary gallery in the new building, nothing is definite. Based on funding, the Twentieth Century and Contemporary Galleries will include 5,000 or 10,000 square feet. The exterior walls will form a rectangular shape, while the interior division of space has not yet been determined. Movable walls will probably lend to the flexibility of the space. With the total area, the division of the space itself is still under consideration.

David Rubin does say, however, that he plans to organize the Twentieth Century Collection by thematic issues, in hopes of breaking away from the generally chronological manner in which art is presently displayed. His themes will include pieces from both early and late twentieth century art. At the Phoenix Art Museum the separation between the two halves of the century has remained intact until now. His themes include: the nude with examples from Alexander Archipenko, Barbara Hepworth and Willem de Kooning, the city with pieces by Oscar Bluemner and Billy Al Bengston, the landscape with works by Joseph Stella and Richard Diebenkorn, cultural diversity with examples from Robert Henri, Feminism with pieces by Georgia O'Keefe and Frida Kahlo, and the still life with

examples by Wayne Thiebaud and Marsden Hartley.⁷⁸ He will use many objects from the current collection, but his themes will display them in a new way and thus tell a new story.

As final contribution to this analysis of the Phoenix Art Museum's organization of the Twentieth Century and Contemporary Galleries, I will conclude with my own suggestions for the rehanging. My preference for the more historical and traditional artists is evident in what I have written. The idea of organizing by themes, which breaks across boundaries of style and nationality. Themes, like the nude, the still life, and the landscape, run through decades and even centuries of art history. In using a specific theme to group the collection, the curator allows for new associations. However, I am not so naive as to believe that an organization by themes is all-inclusive. Themes prohibit connections between artists working in a certain style or a certain medium. And even within the division of themes, there are subdivisions which limit the possible stories told. If Bill Al Bengston's *India City* is grouped with other depictions of the city, it cannot hang solely among artists working in California.

Yet the theme as an organizing principle strikes me as innovative. It leads new ways to make associations between artists and their works. What impressed me about the small room was the inclusion of works in a variety of media: acrylic, plexiglass, oil on canvas, oil and lacquer on masonite, and photo emulsion on wax and mylar with ink, paint and wax pastels. The pieces had no image which appeared in all five ways, yet the associations between the

⁷⁸Phone Interview with David S. Rubin.

X. Personal Projections for the Phoenix Art Museum's Contemporary Collection

As final contribution to this analysis of the Phoenix Art Museum's organization of the Twentieth Century and Contemporary Galleries, I will conclude with my own suggestion for its rehanging. My preference for the room housing the California artists is evident in what I have written. I like the idea of organization by themes. It breaks across boundaries of medium, style and nationality. Themes, like the nude, the still life, and the landscape, run through decades and even centuries of art history. In using a specific theme to group the collection, the curator allows for new associations. However, I am not so naive as to believe that an organization by themes is all-inclusive. Themes prohibit connections between artists working in a certain school or a certain medium. And even within the division of themes, there are subdivisions which limit the possible stories told. If Billy Al Bengston's *Dodge City* is grouped with other depictions of the city, it cannot hang solely among artists working in California.

Yet the theme as an organizing principle strikes me as innovative. It lends new ways to make associations between artists and their works. What impressed me about the small room was the inclusion of works in a variety of media: acrylic, plexiglass, oil on canvas, oil and lacquer on masonite, and photo emulsion on wax and mylar with ink, paint and wax pastels. The pieces had no image which appeared in all five works, yet the associations between the

artists revealed underlying relationships between the objects. Kurtz' story relied on written explanation to communicate his message. The paintings alone would not suffice in telling the story. Of course he did not invent the stories. The objects do contribute. Had Kurtz tried to substitute a Picasso for one of the works, the story would not have been the same. The successfulness of the story relied on both the objects' inherent qualities and the message perceived and communicated by the curator.

I think the solution exists in finding a balance between preserving the artist's creative intentions and offering new interpretations of the works. In looking toward the future of the Phoenix Art Museum, I would maintain the focus on education. If art does not communicate to its audience, it does not perform its function. The museum curators should continue to help museum visitors to understand the messages communicated by art. Tours and labels provide both verbal and written explanations. Audiences respond to both, depending on their learning preference. However, the tours and labels should stimulate the viewer to participate actively in the museum experience. The visitors will appreciate the experience most when they make their own conclusions. Questions, instead of lists of historical facts, help to include the visitor in active viewing. The curator should avoid forcing dogmatic interpretations on the viewer. Still, the very nature of presentation implies a point of view in the presentation.

Knowing the inevitability of all this, can the benefit outweigh the risk? I would answer yes. To display art, the museum

must choose to place certain objects near one another. Given this reality, it seems advantageous to attempt to organize the art in some fashion. Here, the question of story enters. For, as already explained, only one story can exist. Multiple interpretations and reactions to this one story can exist, but these responses all come from the one story. However, the examples in this paper have shown the possible stories are endless. New readings of art demand that stories change and adapt to new information. Time, itself, moves forward, giving curators new perspectives on art.

New perspectives promote new installations. The process is rejuvenating; it gives new life to the collection. The objects may be the same, but the presentation is different. I find this realization exciting. With it comes the guarantee that the art object can never be exhausted. New stories give the object new lives. The fear remains that the curator may impart a story that does not represent the object truthfully. Yes, the curator does have some freedom in the story he or she tells, but the objects can only communicate within a certain range of possible meanings. Therefore, the objects themselves check the curators.

In my own projections for the Twentieth Century and Contemporary Galleries at the Phoenix Art Museum, I prefer a focus on the artists. I would want visitors to understand the creative genius behind the object they see in front of them. I would place the artist's message as a the paramount story. The advantage in dealing with contemporary artists is that many of them are alive. I would hope to utilize this particular characteristic of

contemporary artists to give the viewer quotes from the artist. The artist's own words are always powerful. For the artist can provide insights into the creative process. He or she can share with the viewer and communicate directly his or her intentions for the piece on display. Also the validity of the story is enhanced when using the artist's own words. The visitor is much more likely to believe the artist's explanation of his or her own work, rather than the suppositions of the curator.

One may have believed in the objectivity of museums, but in the late twentieth century, curators are ready to acknowledge the individual stories they tell.

The current trend to recognize the subjective stories stems not only from our self-critical consciousness of art history, but more importantly from an overall awareness of the diversity of our culture. In a society consisting of a diverse population, different stories are inevitable. The paradigm shift in the late twentieth century values multiple points of view over absolute pronouncements, it prefers contextual studies over formalism and recognizes the diversity of the audience.

IX. Conclusion

Museums inevitably tell stories. The nature of displaying art demands it. The popular mythology surrounding the museum may claim that it is a neutral, objective space, but historical research counters this belief. The research shows that museums and their staffs usually give a presentation of their art that reflects their point of view. Earlier centuries may have believed in the objectivity of museums, but in the late twentieth century, curators are ready to acknowledge the individual stories they tell.

The current trend to recognize the subjective stories stems not only from our self-critical consciousness of art history, but more importantly from an overall awareness of the diversity of our culture. In a society consisting of a diverse population, different stories are inevitable. The paradigm shift in the late twentieth century values multiple points of view over absolute pronouncements, it prefers contextual studies over formalism and recognizes the diversity of the audience.

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