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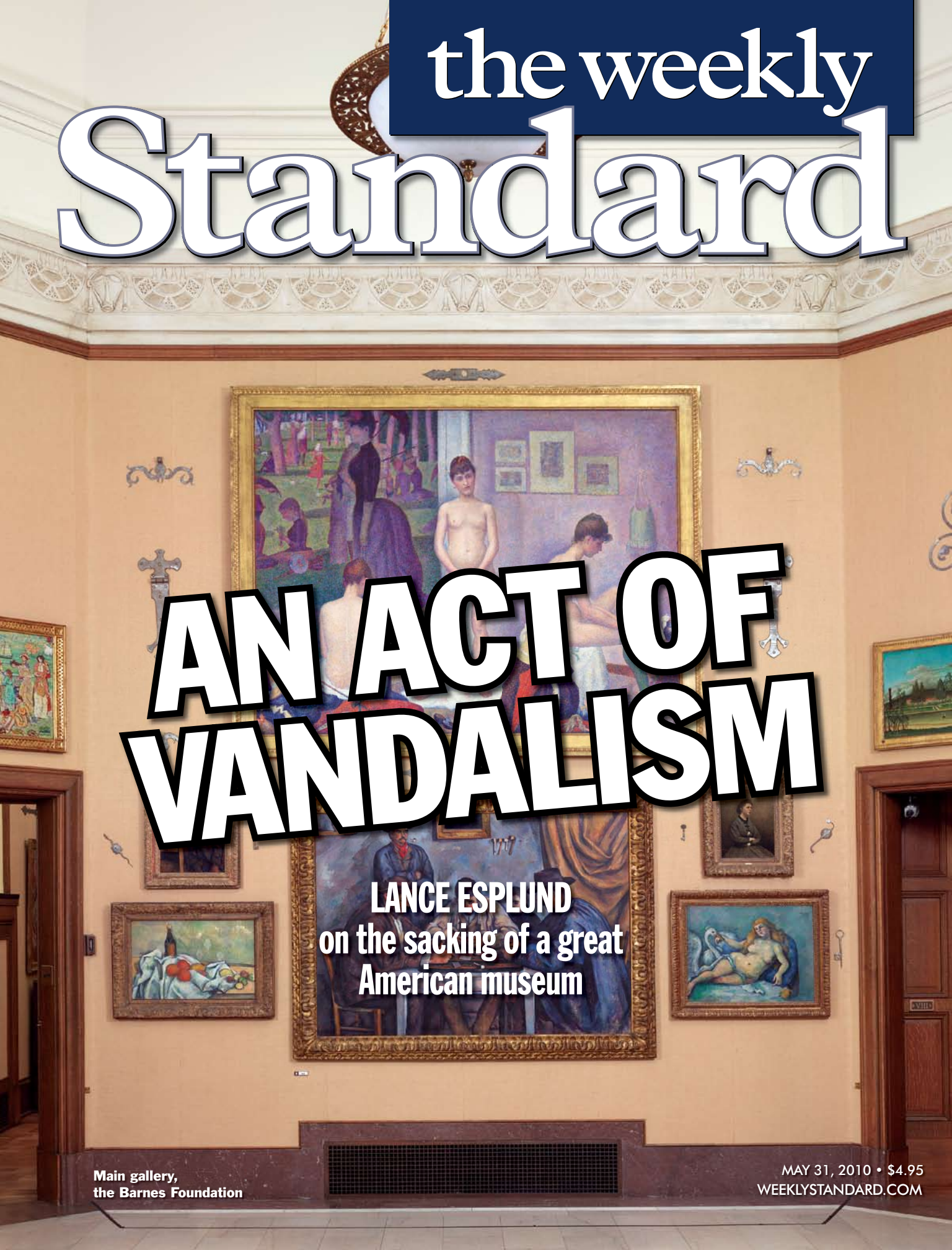

AN ACT OF VANDALISM

LANCE ESPLUND on the sacking of a great American museum

Main gallery, the Barnes Foundation

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No Museum Left Behind

The relocation of the Barnes Foundation to downtown Philadelphia is fueled by ignorance and avarice, not altruism.

By Lance Esplund

Merion, Pennsylvania

Moving through the Barnes Foundation, you feel immersed in a complete work of art, as you do when deep in the nave of a Gothic cathedral. The Barnes seems wonderfully timeless and out of place. The world and the works of art are in sync. Mature trees can be viewed through tall windows—the arcs of their branches echoing pictures' arabesques. The only sounds are of the occasional bird outside, the measured movements of a handful of visitors, the creak of old parquet beneath your feet. Artworks flirt and flit. Parts of paintings, like flashes of jewels or glimpses of flesh, pull and lure you from one to the next.

No matter how much you know about the Barnes Foundation—no matter how often you've been told that it houses the most important collection of Impressionist, Postimpressionist, and early Modern art in the world—nothing, especially its deceptively small scale, prepares you for the experience inside the museum.

Henri Matisse, Seated Riffian *(1912)*

First, there is the artwork itself. The catalogue is staggering. Albert Barnes acquired Old Master paintings by Canaletto, Goya, Hals, El Greco, Titian, and Veronese and important examples of ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Medieval, Native American, African, Near Eastern, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern art. Then there is the collection of Modern European works. One of the largest in existence, it includes pictures by Chagall, de Chirico, Daumier, Dufy, Gauguin, Klee, Marquet, Miró, Pissarro, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon, Rouault, Signac, and Sisley. Barnes bought 11 works by Degas, seven by van Gogh, six by Seurat, four Manets, and four Monets. He purchased 18 Rousseaus and 46 Picassos. Barnes acquired 21 pictures by Soutine (whom he discovered). And it is no exaggeration to say that if you have not been to the Barnes, you have not seen Matisse, Cézanne, or, especially, Renoir. The collection holds 59 Matisses, 69 Cézannes, and a definitive 181 Renoirs. Barnes loved Renoir's miraculous late nudes—paintings whose rotund volumes and luminous flesh are as erotically charged as those of Rubens and Titian. And at the Barnes Foundation, where Rubens is stationed next to Renoir, who is in earshot of Matisse, Titian, and Bonnard, such comparisons are self-evident.

Yet the magnificence of the foundation is much greater than the sum of its masterpieces. The installation puts the nature and language—the very life—of art above any single work. Packed wall-to-wall, the collection is hung salon-style, without regard for the trappings of -isms, periods, or styles. Barnes, who oversaw every detail of the museum's creation, intermixed the past with the present and organized pictures and objects visually and thematically into ensembles. He created an environment that erased the business-as-usual distinctions between classical and primitive; ancient and modern; among applied, decorative, and fine arts. Paintings, drawings, and prints elbow one another as if to stand out from the crowd. And they

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The visitor's first sight of the Barnes's Main Gallery: Matisse's 1930 mural The Danse *floating above the painter's* Seated Riffian *(1912) and Picasso's* Composition: The Peasants *(1906)*

are surrounded by other captivating objects, including ironwork, textiles, pewter, pottery, African masks, Navajo rugs, turquoise jewelry, medieval carvings, illuminated manuscripts, early American furniture, and American folk art—yet another of Barnes's pioneering enthusiasms. Here, in this living museum where plastic formal values are made paramount, nothing is supplemental or taken for granted; everything is in chorus and plays its part.

Albert Coombs Barnes (1872–1951) believed that the chief value of a democratic society is that it enables every individual the unique opportunity to better himself culturally and spiritually. He thought the key to self-awareness is the study of art, philosophy, music, and literature. Driven by his love of art and ideas, he created a new species of museum. Barnes was not interested in amassing an art collection to bolster his ego or to impress his friends.

Although he collected a wide array of art and artifacts, he was not interested in creating an encyclopedic or national collection like that of the then-burgeoning Metropolitan Museum of Art. And although he was a passionate advocate of the European avant-garde (Barnes wrote extensive critical monographs on Renoir, Cézanne, and Matisse), he was not primarily concerned, as was the Museum of Modern Art (founded in 1929), with introducing that group of artists to the American public. Barnes's interest was in the living nature of artworks. He set up dialogues among works of various periods and diverse styles to emphasize similarities where most museums emphasize the distinctions. Barnes understood that the ancient Greeks, Titian, Rubens, Renoir, and Matisse, far from disconnected, are links in the chain.

Barnes wanted people to appreciate how artists think; how artists are inspired; how art furthers art. He strove to emphasize a work's sublime, as opposed to its mimetic, values. In his writings, he compared learning to see to learning a foreign language and stressed that through the act of developing our senses, our perceptions are heightened and our lives made richer. "Vision and intelligence," Barnes wrote, "are co-implicative, neither is possible without the other, and all growth involves their interaction."

> This general principle furnishes us with the clue to esthetic education. We perceive only what we have learned to look for, both in life and in art . . . to appreciate [a] painting . . . we must reconstruct [the artist's] experience, so far as we are able, in ourselves. . . . To see as the artist sees is an accomplishment to which there is no short cut, which cannot be acquired by any magic formula or trick; it requires not only the best energies of which we are capable, but a methodical direction of those energies, based upon scientific understanding of the meaning of art and its relation to human nature. The artist illuminates the objective world for us, exactly as does the scientist, different as the terms are in which he envisages it; art is as little a plaything, a matter of caprice or uncontrolled subjectivity as is physics or chemistry.

To this end Barnes created an environment where aesthetic values override all others, where viewers are encouraged to make visual connections: to discover that a Matisse or Picasso nude could have walked directly off of a Greek vase. That van Gogh's immanent frontality—his volumetric figures held within flat planes of yellow—is no different from that of a Byzantine madonna held within planes of flat gold leaf. That, moreover, van Gogh's nervous, swirling line and compartmentalized spaces are equally related to early Netherlandish painting, Japanese prints, and Impressionism. That art, like human nature, is not linear but cyclical.

Barnes wanted to empower people to experience art—and, by extension, life—at its most profound levels. In 1930, when Matisse first visited the foundation, he wrote in his notebook that it was "the only sane" place to view art in America. That same year, he remarked in an interview:

> One of the most striking things in America is the Barnes collection, which is exhibited in a spirit very beneficial for the formation of American artists. . . . This collection presents the paintings in complete frankness, which is not frequent in America. The Barnes Foundation will doubtless manage to destroy the artificial and disreputable presentation of the

other collections, where the pictures are hard to see—displayed hypocritically in the mysterious light of a temple or cathedral. According to the current American aesthetic, this presentation seeks to introduce a certain supposedly favorable mystery between the spectator and the work, but it is in the end only a great misunderstanding.

But Matisse was overly optimistic. The Barnes Foundation never influenced other museums and remained a completely unique institution immune from the postwar homogenization of the American museum establishment. Over the years, though, it became a target of that establishment which coveted the art that Barnes had acquired long before it became fashionable. Now after years of litigation, Albert Barnes's intentions have been subverted and his will broken. And the Barnes Foundation is scheduled to be moved. Galleries have already been closed. Ground broken. Pictures crated. The thousands of artworks are all being uprooted from their home in Merion, Pennsylvania, a leafy suburb 20 minutes from downtown Philadelphia, and transplanted to the mall on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway next to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Advocates claim the relocation is being done in the name of progress, conservation, civic responsibility, and convenience. It all sounds benign enough if you fail to consider that the Barnes Foundation, unlike almost every other museum in the world, is a rooted organism. Yes, the artworks will arrive in Philadelphia, but the museum—the experience of its art—will be irreversibly maimed. And with its move there will be considerable collateral damage extending to the broader areas of museum stewardship, museum donors, and the public trust. Besides violating the legal will and stated intentions of the foundation's sole benefactor—who stipulated that no work in his collection ever be loaned, deaccessioned, or moved from the building he had designed for it; that no object ever stray, not even an inch, from the precise spot in which he had personally placed it—the move is an unforgivable act that disregards the true purpose of museums.

The Barnes Foundation was established in 1922 as a nondiscriminatory school for art and philosophy. Its two-story Renaissance-style building was completed in 1925 and, ensconced in a 12-acre arboretum, sits deep within a sloping yard behind a wrought iron fence, surrounded by lilac groves, formal rose and perennial gardens, and one of the finest collections of ferns and rare trees in America. Designed by Paul Philippe Cret, the building is itself a distinguished work of art. Barnes had commissioned Jacques Lipchitz to carve eight sculptures and used them for the museum's exterior. Enfield Pottery and Tile Works fabricated the entrance to Barnes's specifications, incorporating motifs from works in his African art collection. (While other museums were displaying African tribal objects as ethnographic artifacts, Barnes, like Braque and Picasso, recognized their aesthetic value.) The entrance is an eclectic interplay of Neoclassicism, Primitivism, and Modernism. Doric columns, Arts & Crafts ceramics, and African-inspired and Modern sculpture—the last, Barnes well understood, in debt to the former—intermingle. You know immediately you are entering a world where hierarchies and cultural identities dissolve and where art, no matter when or where it was made, is in concert.

The art is installed in a suite of 24 interconnected galleries of varying dimensions spread over two floors and the refined, intimate spaces make it as much manor as museum. Picture by picture, room by room, juxtaposition by juxtaposition, you get to know what Barnes was trying to convey about the nature of art. Though sequentially numbered, the galleries are in no discernible order. And there are no distracting wall labels. If you are interested in who, what, where, or when, each gallery is equipped with laminated photographs of its walls, each labeled with names, dates, titles, and provenance.

It is the Main Gallery—the central trunk and heart of the Barnes—from which all the other galleries are fed and grow, literally and metaphorically, across disciplines and time. Though the largest room at the Barnes, the Main Gallery is small by modern museum standards, only 53 feet long and just over 22 feet wide. Yet its vaulted ceiling, which rises 33 feet, gives the space the loftiness of a cathedral. And its installation is built upward and across like a stained-glass window (specifically a Tree of Jesse, one of the most constant subjects of Western art, linking the Barnes to both Chartres and the Sistine Chapel). Barnes envisioned the museum as a family album, in which artworks relate to one another like sisters, brothers, and cousins. Familial resemblances are emphasized, without ever detracting from the individual work of art. Barnes understood that artists are inspired by numerous impressions from disparate sources. In his museum, one does not receive a lesson in art history; rather, one joins into a meditation on art.

Entering the Main Gallery you are confronted with pivotal paintings by the two pillars of 20th-century art. A Rose-period Picasso, *Composition: The Peasants* (1906), hangs between the windows to your right. In soft pinks, powder blues, and warm grays, it alerts us to the predawn of Cubism. Its faceted figure grouping of oxen, a girl, and a man with a basket of flowers on his head feels like a bas-relief. These are not just peasants but as much Greek god and goddess strutting through the plane as a single organism.

Near the Picasso, between the windows to your left, hangs a Moroccan-period Matisse: *Seated Riffian* (1912). Nearly abstract, in dazzling, saturated hues, the painting's

The west wall of the Main Gallery featuring Seurat's Models *(1886-88) and Cézanne's* Card Players *(1890-92)*

jewel-like colors and the figure's majestic pose equally suggest a precious gem and the portrait of a king. The painting's transparent, light-filled curtains and vertically striped planes, resembling the mullions, curtains, and glass of its neighboring windows, appear to punctuate the architecture of the Main Gallery. The Matisse and Picasso—changing peasants into deities, ruffians into royalty, and walls into windows—attest not only to the transformative power of painting, but to the transformative power of this museum.

Above the two paintings, as if anchored by and unfurled from those below, is Matisse's Dionysiac mural *The Dance* (1932-33), spanning more than 45 feet across three lunettes. Commissioned by Barnes in 1930, it is among Matisse's greatest and largest works. Matisse took into consideration that *The Dance* would be experienced alongside very specific paintings and views of sky and garden seen through the windows (which were often left open during spring, summer, and fall). The painter allowed nature's greens to complement painted pink, for blue sky to speak to sky blue, and for *The Dance*, as graphic and bold as it is, to blend with spring's rapture and the blaze of fall foliage. Matisse formed beings that merge woman with goddess and succeed in transforming gallery into spiritual setting. The mural is a celebration of art that, moreover, unifies nature, artworks, and architecture at the Barnes Foundation.

Moving laterally—a combination of thrust and counterthrust, of anchor and loft—*The Dance*'s eight large, soft-gray female nudes spread across the three lunettes like acrobats. The nudes appear to billow and bulge within the vaulted arcs of the architecture. They are goddesses, caryatids, and flying buttresses. They are grounded, held to the walls, by flat, sharp-edged planes of black and blue, and they are aerated by planes of pink. The nudes swell into ecstatic volumes and tumble through the arches across the upper wall, opening the architecture and penetrating the dome of the ceiling. It is as if they have fallen from the sky and been caught in the gallery's net. They are the soul of the Barnes collection and the engine that animates the whole installation.

Matisse observed of his mural that "from the floor of the gallery one will feel it rather than see it, as it gives the sense of sky above the green conveyed by the windows. . . . [The great hall] is a room for paintings: to treat my decoration like another picture would be out of place. My aim has been to translate paint into architecture, to make of the fresco the equivalent of stone." Barnes, who had given Matisse complete freedom to paint the lunettes however he desired, at once knew the significance of *The Dance*: "One would call the place a cathedral now," he told Matisse after the mural

was installed. "Your painting is like the rose window." Matisse agreed and added that *The Dance* "is like a song that mounts to the vaulted roof."

Facing *The Dance* are 11 paintings by Cézanne and 22 by Renoir, mostly the latter's pearlescent late nudes—as soft as feathers, as iridescent as gems, as weighty as great oaks. Crowning a dozen paintings on the east wall, including a Tintoretto, a Corot, and a work attributed to Chardin, is Cézanne's monumental *Large Bathers* (1900-05). This painting, summoning equally the Parthenon and Poussin, is somewhere between procession and pastoral. Its eight luminous female nudes, an animated and restless frieze, bathe and towel themselves in a dappled blue-and-green-shaded glade. Looking back and forth between the frieze of eight figures in *Large Bathers* and the frieze of eight above in Matisse's *The Dance*, it is nearly impossible not to feel that the bathers and the dancers are related—implying before and after, immersion and emancipation, rest and flight.

Paul Cézanne, Card Players *(1890-92)*

The connections are ever apparent. Corot, Courbet, Impressionism, and Cézanne freed Matisse and Picasso to reinvent the art of the 19th century for the 20th century. But Modernism's roots, Barnes understood, go much deeper. As a beginning painter, Matisse made his first copies in the Louvre of Chardin. And, as Barnes himself wrote, Picasso's *Composition: The Peasants* was a reinvention of El Greco's faceted, fractured space—that El Greco was a spur to Cubism. Renoir brings us full circle. Though initially seduced by Impressionism's miraculous pyrotechnics, Renoir eventually saw it as a "blind alley." He sought to reinvest Impressionism's atomized light with the structure and geometry of the Old Masters. Looking back, specifically to Rubens, Renoir opened the doors for Cézanne's own return (through Poussin) to the cube, the cone, and the sphere—the building blocks of Cubism, which shattered Renaissance space and led to Modern abstraction.

Renoir, although he was too grounded in his love of the female form to become an abstract artist, sympathized with the aims of Kandinsky. Renoir, too, dreamed of dispensing completely with the world of things in his pictures. He relished the complete freedom of abstraction (and he understood his role, as well as that of Picasso and Matisse, respectively, in the movement toward nonobjective painting). But Renoir recognized also that the fruits of abstract art belonged to the next generation. Late in Renoir's life, Matisse visited him. "In all truthfulness," Renoir told the younger painter, "I don't like what you do. I'd almost like to say that you are not a good painter, or even that you are a very bad painter. But one thing prevents me from doing this: When you put black on the canvas it stays in its plane. . . . So, in spite of my feeling, I think that you are most surely a painter." Barnes's installation, especially his pairings of Matisse with Renoir and Seurat with Cézanne, acknowledges and reiterates the language and interconnectedness of art—the links between Renoir and Rubens, Matisse and Renoir, Picasso and El Greco.

On the other end, the west wall, among an ensemble of smaller works by Cézanne, Corot, and Rousseau, are two further monumental paintings: Cézanne's *Card Players* (1890-92) and, hanging directly above it, Seurat's large *Models* (1886-88). Together they demonstrate how specific pictures appear to have been made in answer to one another—as if in a magical world of call and response—and set in motion an idea that radiates throughout the whole of the collection. Barnes lays out the story of Modernism here. He reminds us that Seurat's Pointillist, neoclassical haze; Renoir's love of mass, shimmer, and curve; Chardin's plainspoken volumes; Cézanne's fractured though solid geometries; Picasso's ruptured plane; and Matisse's spare, buoyant eroticism are all interrelated and interdependent.

The Card Players depicts three men at a table, while a man and a child face us and observe the game. It combines multiple genres: The picture's tabletop is both still life and landscape; the figure grouping, like a mountain, evokes Cézanne's paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire; and the wall holds its plane yet opens into sky-like airiness. And the whole elevates a card game to the level of history painting.

Cézanne is the father of Modern art, and, at the Barnes, he is repeatedly given pride of place. More viscerally than any other Modern painter, Cézanne got at the existential nature of seeing. He refused to ground us in a single fixed viewpoint, instead exploring relationships, relativity, and the act of seeing—of changing focus and location—as much as he explored the objects he depicted. In *The Card Players*, Cézanne continually moves our point of view and depth of

field, creating shifting spatial pockets that force viewers to bounce constantly from location to location, from viewpoint to viewpoint. Cézanne breaks down forms into tessellating, anxious geometries—the building blocks of pictures. His works link the shivering, fiery contours of Renoir and the twinkling Pointillism of Seurat to the planar faceting and pared-down geometry of Cubism. Like Seurat, Cézanne got solid form one step closer to abstract flight.

Seurat's *Models* pays homage to the nature of picture-making—a bountiful theme taken up by artists as diverse as Velázquez, Vermeer, Braque, Klee, and Balthus. Seurat depicted three nude models in a studio interior. On the left of the painting, leaning against the studio wall, and providing backdrop and window, is Seurat's now-famous landscape *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-86, Art Institute of Chicago). Cluttering the studio are parasols, clothes, and still life objects—props recognizable from many Seurat paintings. The central nude is life-size. She faces viewers and, with a tilt of her head, seems to contemplate us as much as we contemplate her. The other two models, flanking her, are seated. One, adjusting her stocking, is in profile. The third has her back to us. Bridging landscape and interior, she actually leans into the space of *La Grande Jatte*. Together, they suggest the Three Graces—another ageless theme, oft engaged—but also an artist pondering the same model in the separate states of posing, dressing, and undressing. The standing nude is the muse of the Main Gallery at the Barnes. She links picture, subject, and viewer.

Like the figurehead of a ship, she pulls the entire interior forward, warping the perspective of the room and reiterating the artifice of painting and the flatness of the canvas—as a picture unfolds within a picture; and the nature of picture-making unfolds within the great hall at the Barnes. The Seurat and the Cézanne appear to spill out of and support each other. In the Barnes's hanging, Seurat's central nude seems to have grown straight out of the pyramidal base of the Cézanne. Taken as a pair, the two paintings, broken down into primary elements—color, line, simple geometric forms, genres, and layered metaphoric themes—present to us all the necessary ingredients of painting. At the Barnes, it is impossible not to feel on some deep level that all of the artworks are instrumental; that, despite their relative merits (some works are, of course, stronger than others), they form a choir in which all voices contribute to the greater song of art.

A medical doctor and chemist, Albert Barnes made a fortune marketing Argyrol, a breakthrough antiseptic drug. At the beginning of the 20th century, he began collecting Modern European paintings—works that very few people then acknowledged as art. Initially, he sent his friend and former classmate the painter William Glackens to Europe to buy pictures for him. In time, empowered by his newfound love of Modern painting, he went on his own buying sprees at galleries and auction houses. Barnes frequently traveled to Europe, where he got to know Leo and Gertrude Stein, who introduced him to Picasso. He avidly collected Matisse, Cézanne, and Picasso long before the scandalous 1913 Armory Show introduced the European avant-garde to the United States and caused these artists to be branded charlatans and degenerates.

Barnes had been inspired by the ideas of William James and John Dewey—whose lectures on scientific education Barnes attended at Columbia University in 1918. Barnes and Dewey became friends who shared and furthered each other's ideas and philosophies. Dewey stressed the importance of learning by doing and of education as a means of investigation and inquiry. Education did not, in Dewey's estimation, amount to the acquisition of facts but to the strengthening of one's perceptive and cogitative skills. Barnes applied Dewey's methods to looking at art, his study of which was grounded not in theory but in everyday experience. Dewey, in turn, learned from Barnes how to look at art, both ancient and modern, and was applying Barnes's perceptions when he developed the philosophy he put forth in *Art as Experience* (1934), a book dedicated to Barnes. Dewey held that aesthetic experience and life experience are inseparable and cultivate one another:

> In order to *understand* the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd—the fire engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth; the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts. The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ball-player infects the onlooking crowd; who notes the delight of the housewife in tending her plants, and the intent interest of her goodman in tending the patch of green in front of the house; the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals. These people, if questioned as to the reason for their actions, would doubtless return reasonable answers. The man who poked the sticks of burning wood would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it.

The foundation has its origins in a free lending library of Modern literature at Barnes's factory, where he also first exhibited his art collection. He cut the work day to six hours and utilized paintings as discussion topics during seminars he initiated for his employees (educated or not; black and white welcome), to help them comprehend art, literature, and aesthetics. Barnes's classes on how to approach art,

which stressed that the art of the present was inextricably linked to that of the past, eventually attracted people from outside the factory. In 1922, Barnes was granted a charter for an educational institution, and he named Dewey as the foundation's first director of education.

When Barnes opened the doors of his foundation in 1925, besides more than 700 European and American pictures, his collection included a substantial assortment of African tribal art—a relatively little known and unexplored subject to which the Barnes Foundation would devote the first book of its kind, *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (1926). Barnes was a strong advocate for civil rights. He collected and supported the work of African-American artists and donated money to Lincoln University, a small African-American college. He invited black students to see his art collection, and black choirs to sing in his galleries, making connections between African art and African-American music. And he was instrumental in recording and preserving the spirituals of the Deep South, which he had loved since childhood. Barnes believed that the black spirituals, born out of slavery, were the supreme American art form, "because they came out of the soil and, like the greatest artistic achievements of the Middle Ages—the Cathedrals—they are an outgrowth of community life inspired by religion." In 1929, when his education program was in full swing, Barnes sold his company (characteristically just three months before the Wall Street stock market collapse) and devoted himself fulltime to the foundation.

Barnes expounded his ideas in essays and in his books, particularly *The Art in Painting* (1925), and to read his writings is to be amazed again and again by this medical man's visual intelligence and his insight into the intentions of artists. But Barnes's brilliance played itself out best in his collection's installation. Here his insights take on a living form.

Standing in the Main Gallery, and looking into the adjacent Gallery VII, you have a perfect sightline to a racy Courbet *Nude* (1864), the central painting among a grouping of a dozen works on the east wall. The Courbet depicts a woman seated on the ground in a landscape. Like the seated model in Seurat's *Models*, she is either pulling on or pulling off her stocking, and, like Seurat's standing female nude, she eyes us from across the room. She is exposed and vulnerable, like the nudes in Cézanne's *Bathers*. And, like those in Matisse's *Dance*, she is lost in ecstasy. A charged intimacy shines forth from both the sexual exposure of her pose and the boudoir-scale of the gallery, from which she seems to call. Facing us with her legs apart, she has one foot crossed over her raised knee. Her body, burning red at its center and around the edges, levitates slightly above the ground, as if she were offering herself and rising toward us. Both to emphasize and relieve the erotic tension, Barnes introduced other elements into the ensemble. Among them, directly below the Courbet, is a Pennsylvania-German chest of drawers. Painted on the face of the chest are tulips and an inscribed heart, which mirrors the exact size and shape—an inverted heart—of the Courbet nude's buttocks. And flanking the chest is a pair of andirons, which lend to the nude and to her sex the quality of a glowing hearth.

Such associations, interactions, and extended metaphors can be found in every gallery at the Barnes. In a Braque still life in Gallery X, impastoed pears echo the impastoed thighs in an adjacent Matisse odalisque—fruit and flesh become interchangeable. In Gallery XII, a painted rooster on an earthenware jug calls our attention to a prancing horse on a beach in a Prendergast seascape. In Gallery XIII, the spindles in the back of an early American chair splay like the tree branches in a Cézanne landscape. In Gallery XIV, a Pennsylvania-German dower chest, decorated with flora, sits below and anchors a large Rousseau jungle scene. Both landscape and chest appear to have come from the hand of the same painter. And in Gallery XV, a Tanagra figure moves like a Lipchitz nude, and an ancient terra cotta bird and the plump bowls of Greco-Roman vases echo the rotundity in the swollen hips and thighs of a Renoir nude.

Hands are the overarching theme of a whole wall of works in Gallery XVI. The grouping includes landscapes by Derain and Claude; Spanish, German, and Flemish religious scenes and portraits; Egyptian relief carvings; and a vitrine filled with dozens of Greco-Roman vases and figurines. In the Claude—the largest work on the wall—a tiny figure, her hand illuminated like a twinkling star against the darkness of the landscape, points upward. That hand calls attention to the hands in every picture and object in the gallery, directing you on an unexpected journey. The supplicating hands in an Egyptian relief flutter in the plane, rippling the stone like water and alerting us to the swirling grain of a maple end table. The Egyptian hands, though abstract, are as expressive, active, and pictorially dominant as the hand of the Christ who blesses us in a 15th-century German *Resurrection* or the hand of Saint Catherine, who blesses Pope Gregory XI. In the corner of the next room, Gallery XV, the prominent, bright hand in a 19th-century American *Portrait of a Man*, seeming to have just been released by that in an Egyptian carving, leads you onward.

Barnes, moreover, orchestrated the artworks to intermingle with hundreds of meticulously placed pieces of old ironwork. At the foundation, the blacksmith and metalworker are honored alongside the weaver, potter, sculptor, and painter. Attached directly to the galleries' walls, among and between the pictures, are a plethora of keys, locks, hinges, latches, door knockers, hooks, handles, tools,

The grouping on the east wall of Gallery VII, centered around Gustave Courbet's Nude *(1864)*

pulls, weather vanes, and kitchen utensils. There's a giant key hanging above Claude's *Pastoral Landscape*, which may have originally been a shop sign. The ironwork provides a teeming garden of filigree, curlicues, curves, and crenulations—an endless interplay of decorative shapes and symbols. Climbing like vines and flames (like van Gogh's cypresses), they unite (and reiterate) the undulations, arabesques, movements, and rhythms in the art and architecture. They alert us to what's going on inside the pictures' ornate frames; and they connect artwork to artwork—zooming and darting our eyes around, among, and through compositions, as if the good doctor were right there, directing our eyes with a pointer.

The ironworks add levity. They energize the galleries and activate pictures with accents, ribbons, flourishes, and bows. Some pieces appear to shoot outward from the canvases like roots, stalks, fireworks, or signal flares. Others appear to jiggle and dance. Some are as regal as coats of arms. In one gallery, a lock and a very phallic key are suggestively placed next to a nude. At times the ironwork pieces top ornately gilded frames like preposterous plumage on overstuffed hats; they act as tongs or pokers ready to pinch and prod; and on occasion they resemble those disembodied canes that reach out from behind vaudeville curtains to pluck unsuspecting actors from the stage.

Above a Renoir nude in Gallery V is a piece of ironwork that, cross-shaped and comical, resembles an abstract wiry figure with arms outstretched and wiggling fingers. Renoir's nude has lowered her towel to reveal her bare behind; and the ironwork figure appears to be calling attention to her disrobing. On the same wall is Gerard David's *Crucifixion with the Virgin, St. John, and the Magdalene* (c. 1485). Christ's crucified outstretched arms mimic those of the abstract metalwork figure. We are alerted to the formal dynamic tension—the vertical and horizontal extension—in both works of art. And the disembodied metalwork figure emphasizes Christ's own forward suspension in the painting. Directly below the *Crucifixion*, sitting on the floor, is an early American spinning wheel. It has the proportions of a child: Its cogwheel resembles a large head, and its supports resemble arms that extend upward—echoing the arms of Christ in the David. Suddenly, we are aware of every form that reaches upward in the gallery, including the splayed paws in Soutine's *Flayed Rabbit* (c. 1921), a painting whose metaphor, plainly obvious in context, is that of the crucifixion.

In 1923, Barnes showed 75 of his School of Paris works at the Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. They were ridiculed, and the vitriolic reception gave Barnes a deep distaste for the academic establishment and well-heeled Philadelphia society. He became very particular about who entered his collection. Barnes once told an interviewer: "The students have to be in earnest. Prestige

doesn't count. Ph.D. or Harvard are zero to us. If the student doesn't have the interest or the ability, he is dead as far as we are concerned, and gets the gate." Barnes enlisted his dog, Fidèle-de-Port-Manech, as his personal secretary. He wrote letters in her voice in answer to all written requests for entry to the Barnes Foundation. Fidèle's responses, each signed with a paw mark and full of references to "my master," are hilariously condescending. Among those turned away by the pooch were T.S. Eliot, Meyer Schapiro, and Le Corbusier. And once you got in the door, Barnes might be posing as a janitor scrubbing the foyer floor. If he heard you ridicule the art, artists, or installation, you too got "the gate."

For years, most Philadelphians couldn't have cared less that they were unable to set foot in the Barnes. But money changes everything. When Impressionist and Postimpressionist art became fashionable and acceptable in America, and the financial value of the Barnes collection (conservatively appraised today at $20 billion to $30 billion) became widely known, a move was set afoot to open it to the public and, eventually, to bring the collection to Philadelphia.

Barnes's untimely death in a car accident in 1951 left control of the foundation to Violette de Mazia, his most trusted disciple and coauthor on many books, his widow Laura, and Lincoln University. But in 1952, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and its publisher, Walter Annenberg—who maintained a life-long animus to the Barnes and whose own foundation is playing a key role in the removal of the collection—filed suit in his managing editor's name, challenging the Barnes's bylaws and regulations, as well as its tax-exempt status as a public institution. Albert Barnes had been in battle with the *Inquirer* for decades but now was unable to fight back. A thorough investigation into the foundation was undertaken, art "experts" were consulted, and in 1961 the doors of the Barnes were forced open. It was decided that a public institution could not be limited to a selected and restricted few. Hours were extended and 200 people were to be allowed in per day. Already, Barnes's devotees, who immediately understood that the foundation was in danger, protested with a flyer that began: "NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC: DESTROYING OUR EDUCATIONAL FACILITY IS NOT BUILDING OUR CULTURE."

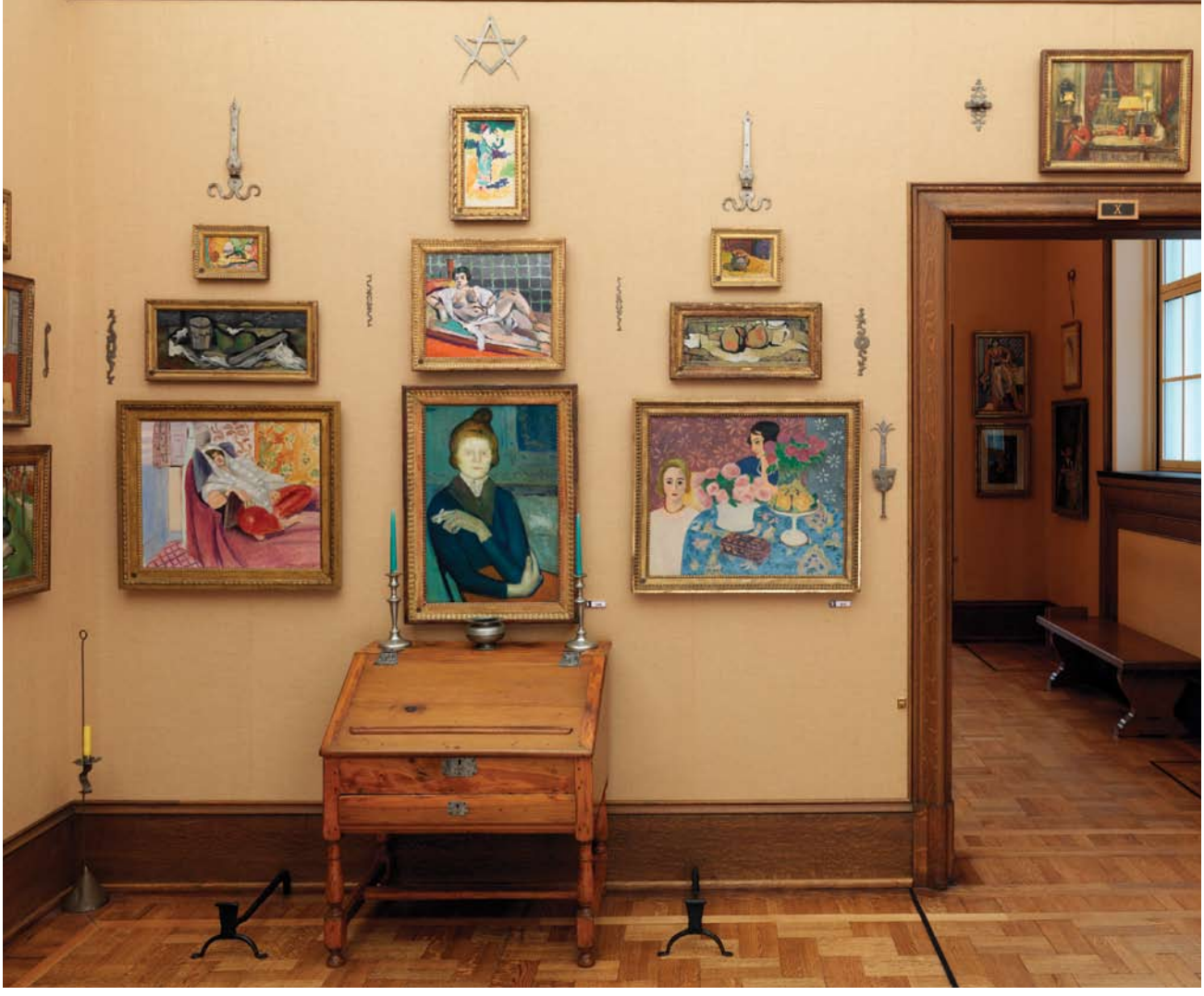
Once the public had access, the public began complaining. They did not want to check their coats and bags. They wanted tours, postcards, and catalogues, as well as labels and spotlights for the pictures. They wondered why children under 12 were not admitted. Journalists complained that no color reproductions of works in the collection were allowed to illustrate published articles on the Barnes. (Although color printing was continually improving, well into the 1960s black and white reproductions—which did less than those in color to distort the true nature of works of art—were preferred by scholars. And Barnes held to the belief that paintings needed to be seen in the flesh.) De Mazia tried to keep Barnes's wishes.

When de Mazia died in 1988, all bets were off. In 1990, Richard H. Glanton, counsel to Lincoln University, took over as the foundation's president. He diversified investments, raised the admission price, and changed policy so that the galleries could be utilized for social gatherings and parties. He tried to deaccession works to pay for operating costs and to bolster the endowment—an act forbidden not just in the Barnes Foundation's charter but to all museums under the tenets of the American Association of Museums. Glanton was not granted permission to sell works, but he had successfully changed the Barnes from an educational institution into a marketable commodity.

In 1993, the exhibition "Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation," accompanied by a lavish color catalogue, opened at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Although it went against Barnes's will, the show was justified as raising money for needed repairs and to strengthen the endowment. The larger purpose, according to its catalogue, was to reach "everyone to whom the paintings in the Barnes Foundation have been a legend—unattainable—and for every devotee of great art and beautiful books." The exhibit traveled to Paris, Tokyo, Fort Worth, Toronto, and Munich, with its last stop—supposedly because the Barnes in Merion remained "unattainable" to Philadelphians—at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

When the foundation reopened in 1995, it had audio guides and a gift shop that sold coffee mugs, T-shirts, color reproductions, and jewelry. A gallery referred to as the "Dutch Room," housing decorative arts, had disappeared and an elevator taken its place. With increased visitors came pollution and traffic. The Barnes's neighbors understandably complained: Tour buses blocked their driveways; fast food wrappers littered their lawns, which were trampled by tourists. Glanton embarked on endless rounds of litigation—including suing the Barnes's neighbors for racism (Glanton is black). In the end, nearly $6 million of the Barnes's endowment was spent on attorney fees. The Barnes was suddenly broke. When Glanton was not reelected, a new president was instated. Admission fees were again increased; a parking lot was added; 1,200 visitors were allowed in per week. But those in charge were truly only interested in the final solution.

And all the while the Barnes's enemies and detractors—led by Pennsylvania governor Edward G. Rendell, then-Philadelphia mayor John Street, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Lenfest and Annenberg Foundations, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art—kept after it. They were willing to offer the Barnes aid, but only after it had become a Philadelphia tourist attraction. In 2002, the Barnes filed a petition, granted in 2004 by Montgomery County Orphan's



A grouping from Gallery X featuring a Matisse odalisque in the center and a Georges Braque still life of pears to the right

Court Judge Stanley M. Ott, to move the collection to Philadelphia. Lincoln University was bribed out of its inherited responsibility with state funding. Although the advocacy group Friends of the Barnes Foundation (barnesfriends.org) continues to mount a strong opposition, the odds are against them. The final victory of Philadelphia's establishment over Albert Barnes is in sight.

The art dealer Richard L. Feigen, who was dismissed from the Barnes Foundation's art advisory committee by Glanton in 1991 because he refused to support the deaccessioning plans, eloquently summarized the deceptiveness of the Barnes move in the *Art Newspaper*:

> One could wonder whether the only reason not to homogenize the Frick Collection into the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Gardner Museum into the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Phillips Collection into the National Gallery of Art, is that they have endowments large enough to keep predators at bay. . . . The arguments for this foolish project are specious. The present Barnes building could easily be made more accessible. Hours could be extended. Shuttle-buses could run continuously from the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a short 4.6 miles away. . . . Insufficient effort[s have] been made to tap private resources for the old Barnes . . . to sell the redundant real estate of Barnes's valuable farm, its 19th-century American pottery collection or unrestricted paintings in the offices, which have been appraised at more than $30m. Despite its claims that the Barnes had run through its money and had to be "saved," the establishment did not really want to "save" it, only steal it.

The building in Merion, which will remain open through June 2011 (though its entire second floor will close the first of January), is slated to become an archival center. The new Barnes is scheduled to open in downtown Philadelphia by 2012. Rebranded as the Barnes Foundation Art Education Center, it will not follow the museum's original footprint. It will be bigger—able to accommodate a projected four times the number of annual visitors, roughly 250,000 people. While the new Barnes's galleries will supposedly replicate the scale, proportion, and configuration of the existing galleries, it will be through a Frankenstein's monster-like revivification. And though almost all of the artworks are to be reinstalled as they were in Merion, there are exceptions. The greatest casualties are those objects and pictures on the balcony and in the stairwell. These include

Matisse's Fauvist masterpiece *The Joy of Life* (1905-06), one of the most important works of Modern art, fully equal to MoMA's famed Picasso *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Barnes positioned *The Joy of Life* directly above the stairwell landing (midway between the first and second floors), where it ingeniously emphasizes the painting's pivotal place—linking the arabesques of Ingres to the free line of Kandinsky—in the movement from representation to abstraction. It also prepares you for the glorious view of *The Dance* from the second-floor loggia. In Philadelphia, *The Joy of Life*, along with other misfit works, will be moved—like an addendum—to a new second-floor gallery just off the balcony.

Henri Matisse, The Joy of Life *(1905-06)*

The new Barnes will also provide a substantial increase in space for programs, classes, seminars, traveling exhibitions, and special events; an auditorium, indoor and outdoor gardens, a fountain, and a restaurant; a larger retail store and increased parking, as well as expanded space for conservation, research, and administration. Three of these new large rooms will be wedged between suites of galleries in the museum. On the west side will be two classrooms, one per floor, which will each separate three galleries from those in the central museum. On the east side will be a three-story indoor garden performing the same feat of dislocation. These classrooms and garden will compete with the scale of the Main Gallery and disrupt the original flow and sightlines between galleries—Barnes's spectacular and well thought-out views that lure and entice you from, for example, the forms in a particular Cézanne in one gallery to those in a particular Cézanne or Courbet or Renoir in the next; from lemon yellow to cobalt-violet; from hand to hand and from nude to nude; from fruit to breast; flower to figure; curve to curve to curve. Such experiences are being sacrificed for retailing opportunities and visitor amenities. Nothing could be further from what Albert Barnes started his foundation to achieve.

For while the Barnes Foundation may be accepted and its pioneering collection desired, it is still not well understood. One art critic told me that during a sponsored press trip to the Barnes to promote the 1993 traveling exhibition, critics from major publications stood around giggling, bewildered by and ultimately dismissive of the installation. An art historian who has not been to the Barnes told me that she had heard the installation was "a distraction from the art." These are the types of arts professionals—the philistines and academics—whom Barnes wanted to keep out of his museum.

It is such people who are hell-bent on turning museums into shopping malls with ease of access to the "customer." Through homogenization and expansion, they have already ruined once-great institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Morgan Library. There is a belief that getting more people in the door is a museum's prime function. As early as the 1930s, Barnes warned about individuals who supposedly are on the side of art but who "mistake the husk for the kernel, the shadow for the substance." Unfortunately, these are increasingly the people in charge of our museums. Barnes gave life to a unique institution, and its present-day stewards should be obligated to follow the ethical oath of others (medical doctors and art conservators among them) entrusted with the care of the living: First, do no harm. The relocation of the Barnes is disguised as altruism, but it is fueled solely by ignorance and avarice.

Museums are peculiar places. While the great national collections and the vast universal museums are essential to a country's cultural life, so, too, are its small, idiosyncratic venues. But with every renovation, museums are becoming less peculiar. Initially "*Wünderkammer*" or "cabinets of curiosity," museums have existed for barely 400 years. Repositories of art and artifacts, they bring us riches from ancient civilizations and faraway lands. But they are much more than collections of cultural fragments, and their role is greater than that of simply caretaker. Museums are accountable also as caretakers for our relationship to art.

Art evolves as we evolve. And as art evolves so, the argument goes, must museums: No Museum Left Behind. Museums are the principal nurturers of our engagement with art, dictating not only what art is but also the environment and decorum surrounding it. And art is dependent upon the life we allow it. Before the museum, there was no such thing as art: statues, fetishes, masks, and pictures were tools and never meant to be elevated to pedestals. The primary weakness of the museum is that through its displacement of objects from their original contexts, things are disavowed of their functions and disempowered of their magical properties. Statues become sculptures, crucifixes become compositions, and portraits become pictures.

But this weakness can also be a strength. In the museum, the crucifix—out of context and freed from its explicit functions, symbols, and metaphors—can operate on a universal level: It is allowed to speak not just to or for Christians but to all—and to other works of art. In the museum, the crucifix, just like the totem, the fertility figure, the landscape, the nude, and the abstract painting, communicates to us as an expression of universal values. In art, spirituality is not denominational but expressed through plastic form.

This is what Albert Barnes understood and advocated. His foundation is a modern temple of aesthetics. Artworks exist outside—above—their specific movement, mythology, time, and place. Each piece is a gateway into an exploration of the language of art; the subject is secondary, even tertiary, to its function as a vehicle for life. The formal tension in a crucifix—that tension between flying and falling; between being held to the earth and being liberated or weightless; that tension between the comfort of gravity and the ecstasy of release—in terms of art and in terms of human nature is universal. At the Barnes, Matisse's *Dance*, Gerard David's *Crucifixion*, and an ancient Egyptian wall carving—in which a goddess is bound within the malleable plane—all explore and express similar dynamics.

Artworks still have power. But that power hangs in the balance. Recently, museums have come to resemble entertainment complexes. They are all expanding, and they are all starting to look the same. In predictable, keeping-up-with-the-Joneses fashion, the architect Renzo Piano, who butchered the Morgan Library, is now designing the expansion of the Gardner. But bigger isn't always better. Museums are living institutions. They flourish in variety. If we persist in homogenizing these institutions at the present rate, it won't be long before all that remains of the Barnes Foundation—and perhaps the collections of New York's Frick, Washington's Phillips, and London's Soane—will be a catalogue in the way there remains a catalogue of the John G. Johnson Collection (which the Philadelphia Museum of Art absorbed against the dead benefactor's explicit wishes nearly a century ago). What's next: Will the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Governor Rendell, and the Pew Family Trusts bring Falling Water to the mall on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway?

Although there are exceptions, most recent museum renovations and expansions have been more about the ambitions of museum directors, the egos of patrons, and the self-centered expressions of A-list architects than about serving the needs of art. Museums increasingly attempt to attract viewers through every avenue but that of art; through movies, restaurants, classes, gift shops, parties, pop-cultural exhibits, and interactive computers. One of the technological amenities the new Barnes will provide is an introductory film about Albert Barnes. But everything important about Barnes he said himself in the creation of the galleries on North Latch's Lane. The uprooting and maiming of the Barnes Foundation is emblematic of a great tragedy: progress overrunning great works of art. Its destruction is no different from the destruction of a Gothic cathedral.

Much more than a museum is being ruined in Merion. A lifeline is being severed. The importance of the Barnes as an educational institution—as a place where artists, as well as the public, can learn to see in a way not encouraged at other museums—cannot be overstressed. It was at the Barnes Foundation, which I first visited as a painting student 25 years ago, that everything my teachers had been saying about the interconnectedness of art finally began to make sense. The Barnes Foundation is not just another way to look at art; it is the way artists look at art.

To move the Barnes collection is to inflict havoc on a distinctive museum experience, one designed to get us closer to the minds of art's makers. To invite in all of the available 21st-century museum amenities and distractions (merely because we can) is to kill the essential spirit of the Barnes. Great museums succeed when they do more than make the old new, the past present. They succeed when, by taking us deep into works of art, they take us deeper into ourselves. This is an experience—a union between art and audience that is spiritual in nature—that Albert Barnes knew had to be nurtured. Like any spiritual encounter, it cannot be bought, sold, or stolen. But it can be destroyed. ♦