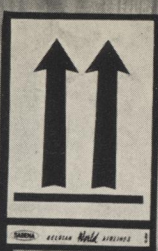


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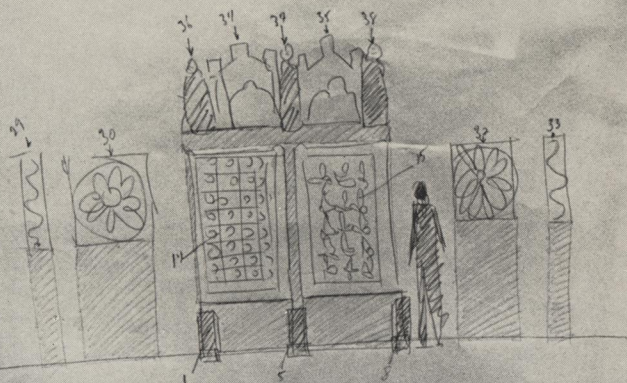


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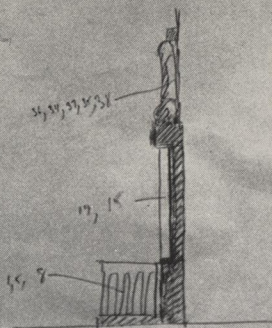
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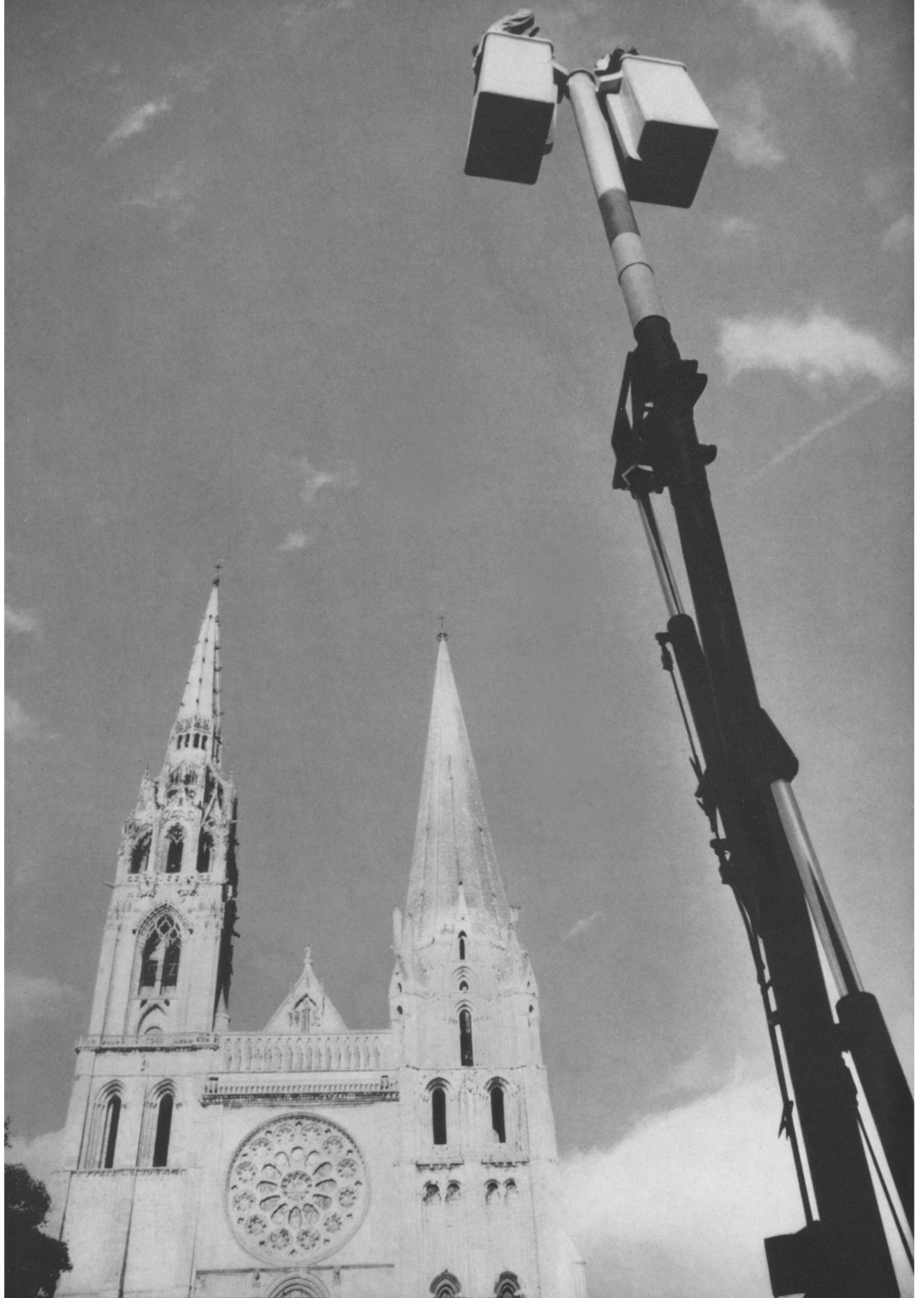
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March 1970

The Metropolitan
Museum of Art
BULLETIN



Chartres, The Year 1200

The Metropolitan on Location

HARVEY STAHL *Research Assistant for The Year 1200 Exhibition*

According to many people we saw daily at the Cathedral of Chartres, the latest miracle of the Virgin began to manifest itself toward the end of the “summer of St. Martin,” the short Indian summer that traditionally ushers in a week of churning, unpredictable weather that, worsening each day, terminates in the Feast of All Saints, the first real day of winter to most Frenchmen. The usual signs of seasonal change – the gradual graying of the yellow Beauce light, the humid, overcast days, the cold and wind – never occurred, but so firmly were such signs expected that, as the feast day approached, one increasingly felt that some cosmic force had relented. On All Saints’ Day, the high mass concluded, the great doors of the Royal Portal were thrown open and hundreds of worshipers thronged out, astonished at both the clear, warm sunlight and the waiting cameras. To the many Chartrains who had followed the course of the weather during the preceding week, the sunlight and cameras were both so extraordinary as to make sense only together; the presence of the one accounted for that of the other. The archpriest and cathedral guardian, the lay priests and guides all explained to the curious, as they had done daily for a month, that the film was about the cathedral, made for an American museum, and that it was to be shown at an exhibition of medieval works of art.

The idea was probably no less strange and exciting for the French than it was for the Museum when discussions began last summer. The Metropolitan had decided to commission a professionally made film that would both enhance its Centennial exhibition *The Year 1200* and be of continuing educational use. A film seemed particularly appropriate. We could exhibit architecture only in fragments and details, but we could hardly commemorate the period around 1200 and exclude Chartres. That the most important monument of this period is also one of the greatest buildings of all time made its representation in the exhibition seem all the more compelling.

In addition, American medieval exhibitions always face the problem of showing what is largely church art – objects that either embellished churches or were used liturgically in them – in a country where medieval architecture does not exist and is little known. It was hoped that the film, to be projected in the gallery area, would not only show what we could not exhibit but also create a context for what we did exhibit. One needed more than just a documentary or educational film “presenting” the cathedral: one needed a film to create a context, to communicate through one visual art – the film – the aesthetic notions and sentiments of another.

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ON THE COVER

Graffiti of an exhibition; see the picture story beginning on page 300

FRONTISPIECE

The filming of Chartres for The Year 1200 exhibition. All the illustrations of this article were taken from 35mm slides or clips made for the film

For this task the Museum, through its Centennial Office, commissioned Francis Thompson. Francis, as he is known to everyone, is a warm, generous man, open and embracing in manner, crisp and constant in humor; his spirit touches all who meet him. A painter and then a filmmaker, he has explored new film techniques, such as simultaneous multiscreen projection, with such sensitive craft that he has effectively enlarged his own medium. His most widely known film, *To Be Alive*, produced by Johnson's Wax for the 1964 New York World's Fair, translates into cinematic terms deep feelings we all know: one leaves the film embracing a joy for life. The choice of Francis as producer seemed evident.

Francis immediately telephoned Wheaton Galentine, a highly respected independent filmmaker with whom he had often worked. Wheaton had worked on an extraordinary range of films, from one on an eighteenth-century house for the Winterthur museum, to a sociological study on Asia that he made with Willard Van Dyke for the Rockefeller Foundation. He was in the midst of filming Wright's Falling Water House at Bear Run when Francis asked him to be director. Wheaton accepted eagerly. Camera-man, director, designer, and editor, Wheaton fathered the film every step of the way.

After making photographic tests at St. Patrick's, Francis and Wheaton began to concentrate on two problems. First, they felt the vertical nature of the architecture was in conflict with the usually horizontal film screen. They decided to use an almost square central screen, flanked by tall, vertical screens for slides that enlarge and complement the motion picture in the center. A computer-programed control system dissolves the slides fluidly into one another and coordinates them with the central screen with a half-second accuracy.

The second problem concerned the dim interior lighting. Usually, one chooses either to expose for the stained glass, in which case the stone appears black, or to expose for the stone, making the glass look burnt out or white. To solve the problem, Wheaton invented a camera that in effect time-exposed each film frame. Artificial interior lighting was then held at a minimum, and stained glass and stone were captured in a balanced, natural light.

In August and September, Francis, Wheaton, and I met frequently to discuss the

The quarry from which the stone for Chartres was taken



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cathedral. I had just finished working on some of the entries for the catalogue of *The Year 1200* and was asked to act as an advisor on the art-historical aspects of the film. Using the resources of the Museum's library and collections of photographs and slides, we explored the broad artistic changes in Europe about 1200 that are the focus of the exhibition. We stressed the structural and design functions of the cathedral's architecture, the development of its sculptural style, and the changing architectural role of stained glass at that time. However, verbal orientation could go only so far: the feeling for the building's space and substantiality, the sense of scale and texture, the radiance of the light had to be experienced on location.

If the blessing of continuously sunny weather made our small crew seem exceptional at the end of our stay in Chartres, in the beginning we were hardly noteworthy. We had just been preceded by American and German crews; we had neither the former's helicopter nor the latter's seventy arc lights. But attention was quickly drawn to us for several reasons. First, we were in a race, both against expected bad weather and against the installation of scaffolding in the central nave for purposes of restoration. Second, Wheaton's modified camera was slow. In order to film a twenty-second sequence, it had to run continuously for thirty minutes, during which time no movement could pass before the camera. Long shots of the interior thus required closing down all major areas of France's greatest cathedral. And, finally, our French crew members, who came with us from Paris, had no intention of commuting home for their social life; some brought it with them, others created it wherever they happened to be.

The late autumn sun rose to the southeast, pouring light over the thin, soaring arches



of the choir's flying buttresses and illuminating the inner ambulatory. Beginning here every day, we followed the sun around the cathedral – in the morning the south flank, at noon the west front, in late afternoon the north flank. Wheaton manned the motion-picture camera and Francis was concerned with slides for the side screens. Peter Campus, another American filmmaker who accompanied us to France and later edited the film, coordinated production details with the French crew, which consisted of a four-person nucleus with additional technicians when necessary. I busied myself with sorting through the thousands of possibilities in stained glass, sculpture, and architecture for the most representative and feasible shots, and in acquiring the numerous special permissions needed day by day from church and government. Our exposed film was sent immediately to Paris for development, and then projected at a Chartres movie house. These “rushes” sometimes preceded the regular evening fare, but often ours was the midnight show. We viewed the developed slides in Francis's hotel room, and it was there that we planned the next day's work.



During the first days we took innumerable exterior shots. For these we explored the countryside, driving through apple orchards and wheat fields, climbing upon every high roof and balcony, and finally renting a truck with a hydraulically lifted basket. The narrow stone passages above and under the flying buttresses were opened to us; we mounted the window ledges and buttress arches, the triforium and towers, the cathedral roof. Everywhere we turned there seemed to be a new shot, an exciting perspective, an architectural detail or bit of precision masonry, a sculpted flower or beastly face. The cathedral seemed never to stop revealing itself.

At the end of the second week, we drove some nine kilometers to the quarry from which the cathedral stone had been taken. During our previous filming, from having climbed all over the high parts of the cathedral, we had acquired a deeply tactile feeling for the stone. Our experience at the quarry was one of recognition at seeing these same stones leaving the earth, unpaled by the air, rugged, and still having a sense of uproot-



edness. The head of the atelier suggested that we return to Chartres by a narrow carriage trail, by legend the route taken by the carts transporting the stone from quarry to cathedral site. We were surprised to find the road perfectly straight. It cut across farms and highways, and each time we rose to a hilltop, the cathedral was dead in front of us. At the time, it seemed like a mystic return to the cathedral's creation. We could all but hear the groaning carts and trudging oxen. The experience remained vivid and eventually influenced the structure of the film, which begins at the quarry and develops into the massive lower stonework of the cathedral.

The moving shots were the part of the filming that caused the greatest spectacle. For these pictures, a dolly or platform is pushed along specially laid tracks, which, at Chartres, crossed a major intersection two blocks from the open-air market. The tracks created a brief, curious diversion in the Chartrains' most routine habit – their daily marketing. Leaping over, walking around, or just stopping to wonder at the tracks



were women loaded down with children and baskets of food, men on bicycles, tourists of every language, truckdrivers happy with an interruption, and the amused men of the town: “*Tu vois le truc là? Formidable.*” “*Ah oui.*” “*Les Américains.*” “*Ah oui.*”

During our four weeks there, we were present at two funerals, two weddings, daily masses, one high mass, and innumerable special invocations. The priest Y. Delaporte, whose scholarly essays first introduced France to the depth and complexity of meaning in Chartres’s sculpture and glass, can still be seen pointing out to friends the seams where the Gothic stone meets the Romanesque. The daughter of Etienne Houvet, whose ten-volume photographic corpus is still the starting place for any student of Chartres, every year guides thousands of school children through the cathedral, correctly using the sculpture and glass as an encyclopedia of religious history and Christian virtue.

Monsieur Debarge, the cathedral’s guardian for more than forty years, recounted for us its recent history, and how during World War II a few dozen elderly Chartrains removed and hid the nearly two hundred stained-glass windows in five days. Not infrequently he would pause in a narrow, hidden passage or stairwell to point out a stone unique in all the cathedral and the identifying mark of the mason who cut it. All the epochs through which the cathedral survived seemed to melt into each other. We found ourselves less and less concerned with problems of distinguishing later parts and restorations; the year 1200 never seemed nearer to the present.

Our lunches were banquets. A great table was laid half the length of a small restaurant near the cathedral. In the beginning, we ordered individually, but as we were sometimes a dozen and the pretty waitress began to notice our husky crew, the courses were brought out on large platters, so generous with hors-d’oeuvres, meat, and fruit that we returned to work with a feeling of abundant well-being. At lunch, our French crew spoke slang brilliantly. They retaught Francis some songs he had forgotten –

Douce France,
Cher pays de mon enfance –

and Francis responded with poems of his own –

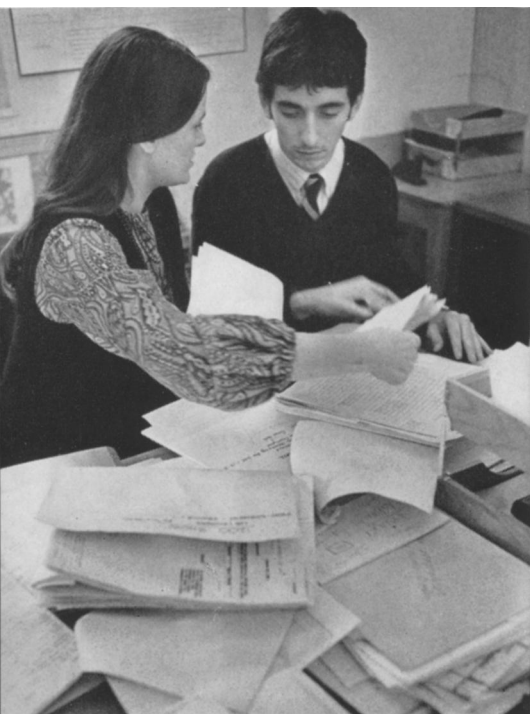
J’ai perdu mon heart
A Chartres.



WORKS OF ART USE EXTREME CARE

WILLIAM D. WILKINSON *Registrar*

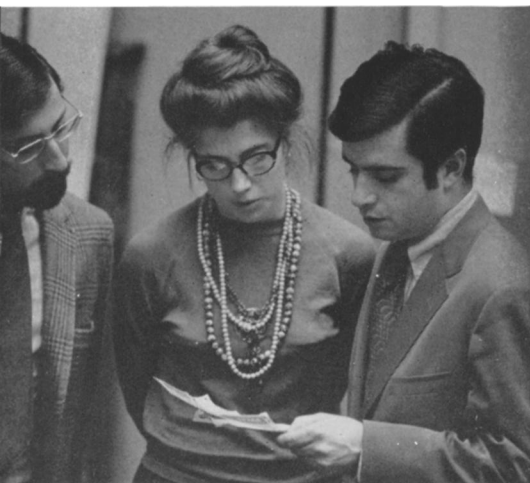
Photographs by Michael Fredericks, Jr.



A museum's first responsibility is to the works of art in its care. Few departments feel the weight of this responsibility to so great an extent as the Registrar's office, which handles all arrangements for bringing art works into the building and sending them out. And there is no time when the details and pressures of this responsibility are more apparent than in the weeks before a major loan exhibition such as *The Year 1200*, which opened last month and will be on view until May.

Paperwork – time-consuming, unglamorous, essential. There is correspondence with lenders about insurance, packing, and customs and travel arrangements, and correspondence with freight forwarders, shipping companies, and airlines. Many documents, too, must be completed in order to bring a work of art into the country. Some of this might be handled by the individual departments, but having it centralized in our office and handled by a thoroughly trained staff frees them for curatorial and scholarly work. Nevertheless, good working relationships with the departments are vital to our operations. No exhibition is free of complications and snags – everything from strikes or storms to the ills and second thoughts that flesh is heir to – and one person from the department is usually appointed to coordinate the details and help us handle the emergencies. He is the key to a successful, smoothly running undertaking, but everyone from department heads to secretaries plays a part.

The safe arrival of an object in the building means that the major part of our work is over. The details of its lending, crating, and shipping have been worked out weeks in advance; we have been kept posted as to its whereabouts and expected arrival time; it has been met at the port of entry by our departmental assistants and driver, together with a representative of the Museum's customs broker, who arranges with customs to have it put under "cord and seal" and taken directly to the Museum (where it will later be examined and passed).



Nancy McGary and David Mash of the Registrar's staff preparing loan papers

Michael Botwinick and Linda Papanicolaou of the Medieval Department with David Hudson, Assistant Registrar, studying a cable giving last-minute shipping information



Art in transit: William Brautigam, Frank Barton, Anthony Matthews, Luke Kenny, and Vincenzo Luvera unloading a van on its arrival from the airport, and Robert Koch, John Dempsey, Vincenzo Luvera, and Anthony Matthews moving the crates into the exhibition galleries, accompanied by Michael Botwinick



George Gutkowski and Dominick Sposili uncrating stone sculpture

A box under customs cord and seal can be opened only in the presence of a customs checker; when a major exhibition like *The Year 1200* is under way, he may come to the Museum two or three times a week. His job is to make sure that the contents of the package jibe with the description on the invoice. His okay does not give the object official clearance, but enables us to unpack it and to check it for damage or necessary repairs, and allows the curatorial and Exhibition Design departments to examine pieces they might know only through descriptions or photographs.



Dieter Goldkuhle, a highly respected craftsman in the field of stained glass, strengthening the leading of a roundel before installation

John Beckwith and Claude Blair of the Victoria & Albert Museum checking glass lent by the V & A with Michael Botwinick



Final clearance is given by a customs import specialist, who comes in about once a week. It would be impossible to overemphasize how important the cooperation of customs is to the Museum, especially for a loan exhibition of this sort, from the moment planning begins through the last-minute deliveries. Many lenders, for example, would not allow objects out of their possession if there were a prospect of long delays for clearance at airport or dock.

At times a loan is so valuable that the lender requests that it be accompanied by a courier, to watch over the crates from the time they leave the owner until they are unpacked and examined in our storeroom.

Once a work of art has been cleared by customs, our involvement with it is officially over. Throughout the tumult of installation we are onlookers, and can sit back and enjoy the exhibition. But about a week after the show opens we must reverse the process: the conferences, correspondence, cables, and calls begin again, not to end until each object is safely back in the hands of its lender.

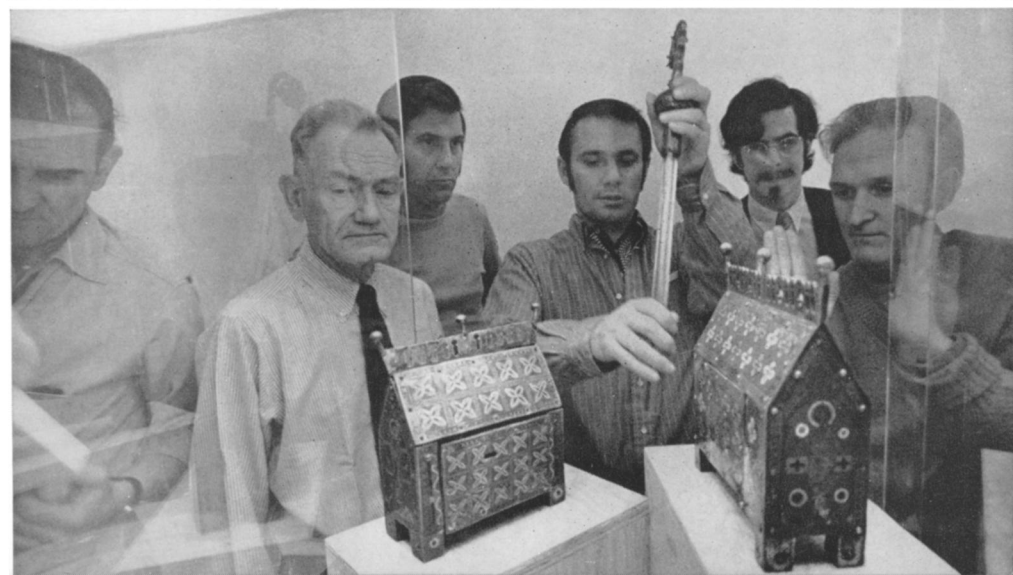
Vincent Juliano and Michael Botwinick opening the case containing the Tournai shrine by Nicholas of Verdun for Samuel Lacher, U.S. Customs Import Specialist



General conference in the storeroom during the examination of the V & A objects – Claude Blair and John Beckwith of the V & A, Thomas Hoving, Director of the Metropolitan, Theodore Rousseau, Vice-Director, Curator in Chief, David Hudson, Assistant Registrar, and Harvey Stahl, Konrad Hoffmann, and Michael Botwinick of the Medieval Department



Installing a case of metalwork: George Asimakis of Exhibition Design, Walter E. Rowe and Henry Wolcott of Conservation, Clifford LaFontaine of Exhibition Design, and Jeffrey Hoffeld and Vincent Juliano of the Medieval Department



The Centennial Tours

JANE SCHWARZ *Freelance writer*

Question: What do a banker from Miami and a housewife from Akron have in common?

Answer: They are both new and enthusiastic friends of the Metropolitan Museum. And they aren't the only ones. There is a rapidly growing number of men and women all over the United States and Canada who are becoming acquainted with the Museum under very special circumstances. This is the result of a program developed and carried out by people who felt that over the past hundred years the Metropolitan has managed to gain two quite different reputations: one as the leading art museum in the country and the other as an awesome institution that tends to overwhelm the out-of-town visitor. In fact, many American art lovers are more familiar with the Louvre and the Prado than they are with the Metropolitan; when in New York, for business or pleasure, they too often prefer the small, less time-consuming Frick or Guggenheim to the impersonal and exhausting Metropolitan.

From the beginning, George Trescher, Secretary of the 100th Anniversary Committee, felt that one of his main goals was for the Metropolitan to emerge from the anniversary year as a national resource. "In this age of ecumenicism, we should be ecumenical too. We wanted to share the celebration with others who are involved in museum work around the country."

According to Trescher, he first got the idea of bringing other museums to the Metropolitan as far back as 1966, when it was suggested to him by Mrs. Vincent Astor, a trustee of the Museum. "I felt that as the mother museum this would be a good chance to improve our relations with curators and trustees in other cities," explains Mrs. Astor. "I've had to travel around the country a good deal and I've always been received warmly, but we haven't done this in New York. I thought this was the time to build up good will for the future."

In the fall of 1968, just one year before the first Centennial exhibition, Dorothy S. Bauman appeared on the scene, and together with Trescher worked out the plan for tours that would enable other museums to send groups of interested people to see the Metropolitan during its coming year of activities.

"We decided that special invitations and arrangements were important," says Trescher, "and by keeping to small groups from different museums we thought we could create a cross-fertilization."

A scheme was developed for a series of three-day tours during the Centennial year. There would be one tour a month consisting of eighty adults – preferably twenty people

from each of four museums. As Trescher points out, "A small museum may have little in common with the Metropolitan but may share many problems with another small museum."

The cost to each individual would be \$150 in addition to travel and hotel expenses. Of this, fifty dollars would go to cover the costs of the tour in New York and a hundred-dollar contribution would be split between the sponsoring museum and the Metropolitan. In this way a museum would receive \$1,000 for sending a group of twenty on the tour.

The next step was to get in touch with the museums and hope that they could be encouraged to come to New York. To make the invitations as appealing as possible, they were hand delivered by Mrs. Bauman. Making great loops through the South and New England and then zigzagging across the country to the West Coast, she personally visited sixty museums, talking to their trustees, directors, staff, and members. She told the history of the Metropolitan and showed slides of the five big Centennial exhibitions, explaining that a group should plan to come when the exhibition that interested them most was in progress, and collecting suggestions of what people might like to have included on the tours.

"We had no idea what the response would be," admits Trescher, "but we were very lucky to have Dorothy Bauman. She has done so many different things over the years that she has friends in every city." The response was tremendous. Mrs. Bauman feels this was in part due to the small museums' pleasure and surprise in the realization that an institution as vast as the Metropolitan would care enough to send someone out asking them to participate in its Centennial. A great many museums that could not be visited were informed of the tours at a breakfast in San Francisco hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Hoving during the American Association of Museums Conference last June.



Photographs by Michael Frederick, Jr.



To date there have been five tours, and Trescher says with obvious pride that he is “enormously pleased with how they have gone. They have been one of the most satisfying aspects of the Centennial.” Their success has been so great, in fact, that the remaining eleven tours that will run through January 1971 are completely filled. When two additional tours were scheduled they also were immediately sold out. In several cases, groups returning home from an early tour have convinced their museum to go on a later one as well.

For the most part, the people who make up the tours are thirty-five to fifty-year-old men and women of the successful business and professional groups, all of whom are members and supporters of their local museum. In many cases the director has been able to come and occasionally the group has paid the way of a staff member.

A typical tour begins in the Museum at a lunch on a Thursday with Hoving welcoming everyone to New York and to the Metropolitan. “He told us the Met was ours while we were here and apparently he meant it,” said a Louisiana visitor. Members of the Museum staff and volunteers are present to answer questions and exchange ideas with the staff of the visiting museums. Lunch is followed by “behind-the-scenes” tours of a variety of Museum departments: the Armorers’ Shop, Far Eastern Art, Exhibition Design, and, before they were opened to the public, the Wrightsman Rooms. For a woman from Minneapolis this was the best part of the tour: “If you don’t actually work in a museum you never get to see this sort of thing.”

There is also a session with Harry Parker, Vice-Director for Education, and members of his staff, who outline their projects and describe the growing importance of that department in the Museum today. “Education is one of the few things a small or newly established museum can do as well as we can,” Parker notes.

That evening there are cocktails at the home of a Metropolitan trustee or member of the 100th Anniversary Committee. Mrs. Ronald Tree, the Arthur Houghtons, Mrs.

Harold Bache, Mrs. Vincent Astor, and the Roy Neuberger have already entertained the visitors, many of whom had never before been inside a private home in New York. Dinner at a restaurant near Lincoln Center followed by the theater or opera completes the first day's activities.

Friday morning the tour is admitted to the special Centennial exhibition well in advance of the usual ten-o'clock opening. This is followed by other tours and lectures of the visitors' choice in different areas of the Museum. That afternoon is devoted to viewing some of the outstanding private collections around the city – no small feat of arrangement on the part of the Centennial office. By Friday evening, when everyone gathers for dinner at a private New York club, a real camaraderie has been established within the group. One member from each visiting museum is asked to speak about his museum's plans. "They are extremely well informed about their own institutions," Trescher has found. "Among their biggest concerns are finances, loan exhibitions, and attracting good staff."

Saturday morning is spent touring The Cloisters and the afternoon is left open for visiting other New York museums or galleries. With this the tour officially ends and the participants, the Museum hopes, now have a special feeling for the Metropolitan and for New York. "My only criticism would be to make the tour longer," one woman reported. "I really could have used another day or so. Otherwise I wouldn't change a single thing."

The details that Mrs. Bauman and her assistant Jill Rodgers have to cope with are endless – always complicated by last-minute cancellations and additions. "A well-run tour requires the cooperation of everyone," says Mrs. Bauman, "and I've had cooperation all the way down the line. Even the guards have gotten into the spirit." The efforts of the staff and the generosity of the trustees have been important, but her highest praise goes to the four volunteers who are assigned to each tour from early Thursday until late Saturday afternoon. These volunteers have all spent a year or more at the desk of the Visitors' Center answering questions about the Museum and are well equipped to handle any problems encountered on the tour. "Considering the number of people involved there are very few snags," one volunteer noted. "You have to realize that they are a very savvy group who know their art, and in many cases they are collectors themselves."

By the end of the Centennial there will be more than a thousand people from thirty museums throughout the United States who have gone on the tours. It is difficult to estimate what the impact will be when twenty well-informed, art-minded individuals return to their community with new enthusiasm to give enlightened help to their own art centers.

Over and over the people who have been on the tours have urged the Metropolitan to reciprocate by sending some of its staff and members to see their museums. Trescher and others are eager to accept these invitations, as they believe there is a great deal to be learned from these places. "If we are to be a truly national museum," Trescher points out, "we must act in a national way."

"The Cloisters . . . The Cloisters . . . The Cloisters . . ."

CALVIN TOMKINS

*This article is an excerpt from *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of The Metropolitan Museum of Art* by Calvin Tomkins, an independent view of the Metropolitan's history to be published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., on April 13, the Museum's one-hundredth anniversary*

Germain Bazin, curator in chief of the Louvre, has described The Cloisters as "the crowning achievement of American museology." Curators here and abroad often speak of the Metropolitan's medieval branch in Fort Tryon Park as the most perfect museum of the twentieth century, the ideal environment for great works of art. The creation of this paragon among museums is also, perhaps, the supreme example of curatorial genius working in exquisite harmony with vast wealth.

The story begins not with the curator, though, but with George Grey Barnard, an American sculptor of great energy and some talent. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Barnard spent a good part of his Iowa childhood stuffing birds and small animals, a hobby that led to his first job as a taxidermist for the Iowa Academy of Sciences. In 1882 he enrolled in the Art Institute of Chicago, determined to become a sculptor. The following year, having sold a portrait bust for three hundred dollars, he gathered up his modest savings and went to Paris, where he entered the Académie des Beaux Arts and lived for the next ten years on the edge of poverty, subsisting mostly on rice and spending whatever money he could scrape up for marble and other materials. Like his near-contemporary Rodin, Barnard rejected the smooth and lifeless ideals of the French academic sculptors of that day. His professional debut at the 1894 Salon du Champ de Mars, where he showed eight sculptures, caused something of a sensation. The largest work, an eight-foot marble group that he later called *Struggle of the Two Natures in Man*—its two naturalistically modeled nude figures symbolized spiritual man breaking free of his earthly nature—was bought by Alfred Corning Clark, the founder of the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Clark presented it to the Metropolitan, where it stood for many years at the foot of the grand staircase. It is now in storage.

His reputation established, Barnard returned to New York and taught for several years at the Art Students' League. A few sculpture commissions came his way, but

he found it very difficult to support a wife and child on his earnings as an artist, and he was seriously considering giving it all up when his friend William Clifford, the librarian at the Metropolitan, persuaded him to apply for the important commission then being tendered for sculptural decoration of the new Pennsylvania State Capitol in Harrisburg. Barnard got the commission. He signed a contract to deliver two complex sculptural groups comprising thirty-three heroic-sized figures—it was the largest single order ever given to an American sculptor up to that time—and took his wife and daughter back to France. They settled in the village of Moret-sur-Loing, near Fontainebleau, where Barnard threw himself enthusiastically into the project.

It soon became evident that he had seriously underestimated his costs. Barnard's fee for the Harrisburg commission barely covered the price of the marble needed to fulfill it, and because he preferred to do all his own stone-cutting rather than entrust any of it to assistants, the time needed to finish the work was much greater than he had anticipated. When his contract money ran out in 1906, the work was still less than half done. A new contract was negotiated, but just at this critical juncture the exposure of graft and corruption in the planning of the Pennsylvania State Capitol threw his sponsors into confusion, and all state funds were cut off.

Dire necessity disclosed that George Grey Barnard, like his large sculpture in the Metropolitan, had more than one side to his nature. For several months previous he had managed to supplement his fast-shrinking capital by buying and selling what he called "antiques"—fragments of medieval stonework that he picked up from local farmers, whose forebears had been in the habit for centuries of patching and repairing their houses, barns, and hen coops with stonework from ruined churches. Barnard paid the local citizenry one franc for a stone figure

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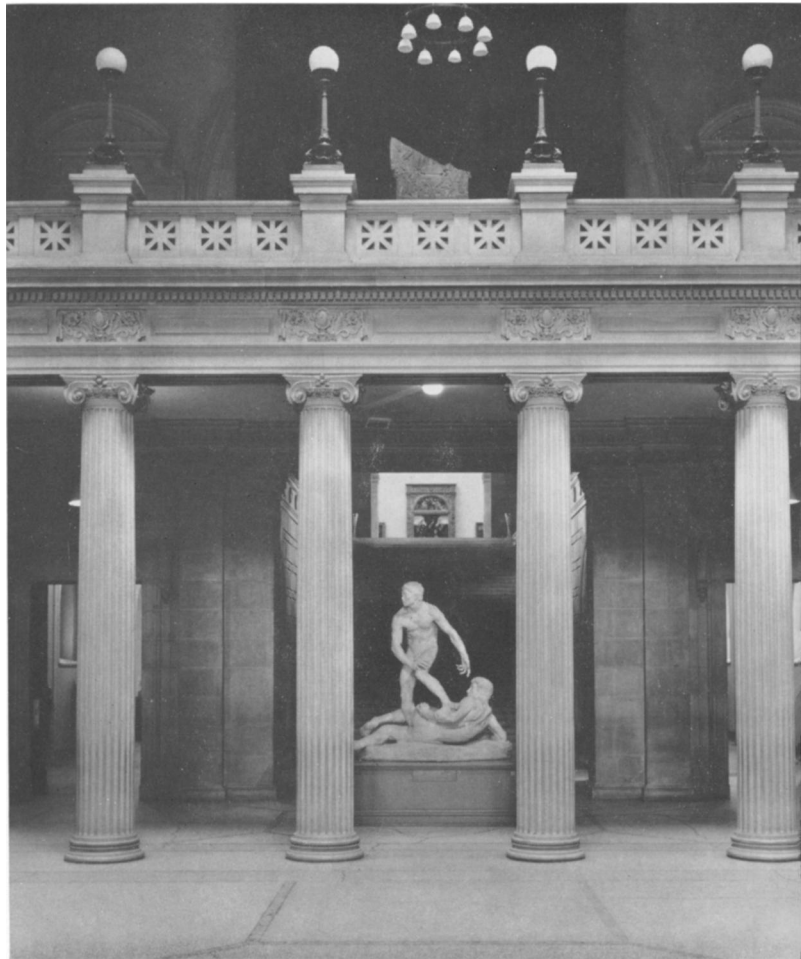
with pointed (Gothic) toes, and half a franc if the toes were blunt, indicating a later period. He was able to sell these finds to dealers in Paris at a gratifying profit. The money thus earned “comes 1000 times easier than by my own sculpture,” he wrote his parents, and by the time his contract funds dried up he had decided that it might be possible to finance the completion of the Harrisburg commission by this means. He began traveling extensively, combing Dijon and the Vosges region and eventually working his way south into Languedoc and the eastern Pyrenees, regions rich in medieval remains. In the fall of 1906 he suspended work on his own sculpture entirely, and devoted the next half year to what he called “peddling antiques.”

A great storyteller for whom modesty was no impediment, Barnard loved to describe his treasure hunting in adventurous detail. He claimed that he had found his limestone relief of the Miracle of St. Hubert and the Stag embedded in the enclosure of a pigpen, and that the magnificent thirteenth-century tomb figure of Jean d’Alluye was being used, face downward, as a bridge over a stream. He pictured himself a roving and romantic figure, bicycling across French fields and spotting Gothic masterworks in the mire. The truth was that he bought much of his material from dealers and sold it to other dealers, showing in the process such an old-fashioned Yankee horse-trader’s talent that he invariably came out on top. Barnard, a short, rugged man who liked to think he resembled Lincoln, was more than a match for the wiliest Paris dealers. He also had a trained sculptor’s eye for superior stone carving, and a ripening passion for Gothic and Romanesque art that helped him track down the finest examples.

Toward the end of 1906, Barnard conceived the more ambitious scheme of buying architectural elements from medieval cloisters. The great monastic orders had established abbeys all over Europe during the Middle Ages—the Benedictine order alone, at the height of its power and influence in the twelfth century, controlled more than three hundred monasteries in France, Italy, Germany, and Spain. Gradually deserted as monasticism declined, pillaged and burned during centuries of war and revolution, dismembered by generations of farmers, some of the ruined monasteries still preserved relatively intact their central cloister, the open court with a covered and arcaded passageway along the sides, where most of the monks’ activities other than worship had taken place. It was here that medieval architecture, which found its highest expression in the cathedrals, showed its more intimate and personal aspect. In a few intensive weeks of

“hunting cloisters” in southern France, Barnard managed to acquire sizable portions of four Romanesque and Gothic monasteries—Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa, Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, Bonnefont-en-Comminges, and Trie. Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa had been for several centuries the most important Benedictine abbey of the entire region. Founded in 878 and finally deserted toward the end of the eighteenth century, its reddish-gray stones were spread all over the neighborhood when Barnard arrived. Ten of Cuxa’s graceful Romanesque arches had been used to embellish a public bathhouse in the village of Prades, and it was the fashion for the local citizens to have at least one column from the abbey in their garden. Although he failed to get the bathhouse arches, Barnard managed to acquire some forty-eight columns and fifty-six arches from the Cuxa cloister, together with the carved archi-

George Grey Barnard’s statue Struggle of the Two Natures in Man at the foot of the Great Stairs in 1937





tectural base on which the columns had rested. No private buyer or dealer was likely to take such a volume of stonework off his hands; Barnard, however, was counting on the Metropolitan Museum.

Roger Fry, who was at that time the Metropolitan's European buying agent, had seen fragments from the Cuxa cloister and indicated serious interest. In a letter to Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke [then Director of the Museum], Barnard said that the reassembled cloister would be "a poem to Americans who never can or will see Europe." Both Clarke and Fry were to arrive soon to inspect the prize. Barnard's hopes soared for a sale that would solve at one blow all his financial problems—he was asking \$100,000 for the cloister. Somewhere along the line, however, J. P. Morgan [the Museum's President] and his confrères must have decided that cloisters did not fit into their current plans. Clarke and Fry never arrived. Although he eventually lowered his price for the Cuxa material to \$50,000, Barnard could find no buyers for that or any other cloister. Bitterly blaming Fry, he stored the massive accumulation of architectural elements in his Moret studio and went back to "peddling stones from house to house in Paris."

That fall a group of New York businessmen took over Barnard's tangled financial affairs. They secured additional financing for the Harrisburg commission, and put Barnard on a personal allowance to cover expenses. He was thus able to resume work on the project, which he finished in 1910 and exhibited at the Paris Salon to great acclaim. Several important commissions followed, including the monumental statue of Lincoln in Cincinnati that is considered his finest work. Barnard could not stop buying medieval stonework, however, and in 1911 he began to talk of establishing a public museum in New York, a museum where young American artists could learn from the master stone carvers of the Middle Ages how to use a chisel, and where the "spirit of Gothic" could once more cast its spell. His fortunes had improved sufficiently for him to consider financing such an ambitious project himself. As it turned out, though, a somewhat belated outbreak of French national pride nearly undid all his labors.

Barnard had reopened negotiations in 1913 with the owner of the Prades bathhouse, Mme Baladud de Saint-Jean, for the twelve arches from Cuxa. The lady agreed this time to sell them, and the stones were in the process of being numbered and crated when an official of the

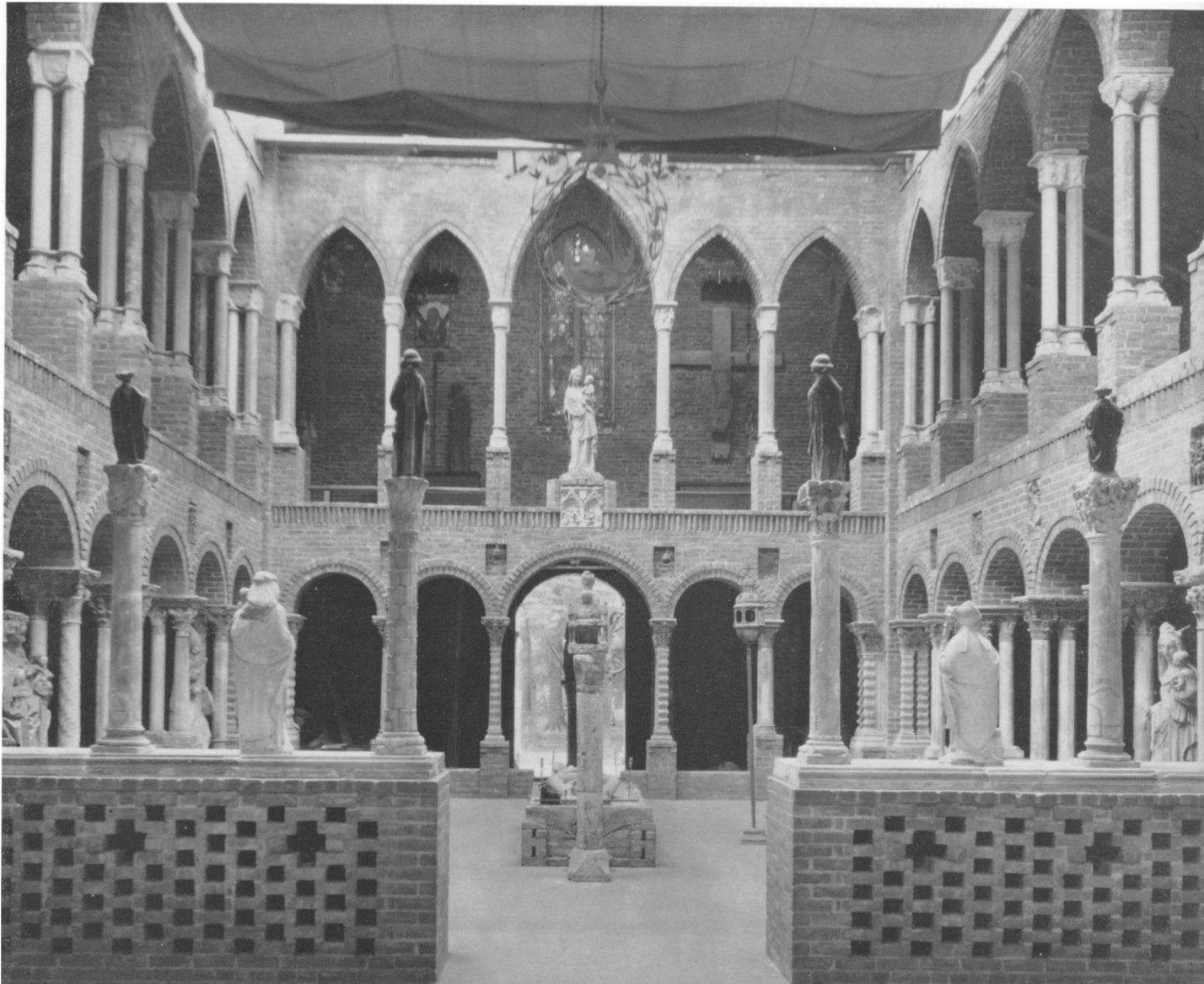
Fragments from the Saint-Guilhem and Cuxa cloisters in a garden at Aniane, near Montpellier, before 1906

French Administration of Fine Arts appeared on the scene with an order forbidding their sale. Barnard found himself in the middle of an international *cause célèbre*, and the target of violent attacks in the French press. He stood his ground for three weeks, but then, realizing that in France as in America one cannot fight *L'Hôtel de Ville*, he announced grandly that he was making a gift of the disputed Cuxa material to the people of France. While the papers that had vilified him were busy praising his noble gesture, Barnard made haste to ship all the rest of his cloisters material out of the country. The Prades incident had stirred up a number of administrative beehives in Paris, and the French Senate was moving to tighten up the old laws governing the classification and preservation of "*monuments historiques*." On the last day of 1913 the Senate passed a new, much more stringent law, which would have prevented Barnard from shipping

out another stone. He had managed to anticipate it by two days. His entire collection was safely in or en route to its new destination, an unfinished brick building that Barnard was putting up next to his studio on Fort Washington Avenue, in one of the less Gothic sections of Washington Heights.

Barnard's "cloister museum" opened to the public just before Christmas the following year. A relatively simple structure laid out in the form of a church, it contained elements from the four cloisters and a great many individual works of medieval sculpture presented in ways that Barnard felt appropriate to the "spirit of Gothic." It was well publicized – Barnard saw to that – and the reactions to it were generally enthusiastic. Henry W. Kent [the Metropolitan's Secretary], having become a great proponent of period room installations for American decorative arts, thoroughly approved of Barnard's

Interior of the Barnard Cloisters in 1925. Photograph: William K. Dickhuth



period museum and recommended many of Barnard's display techniques to the designers of the new Cleveland Museum for which he had been asked to be a consultant. Arthur Kingsley Porter, whose books had helped to stir interest in the Middle Ages, told Barnard that he found it "the most beautiful museum I have ever seen." Another visitor who came away favorably impressed was John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The straitlaced only son of the world's richest man was introduced to Barnard by Welles Bosworth, the architect of the three-thousand-acre Rockefeller country estate in Pocantico Hills, New York. From Barnard's point of view the meeting could hardly have been more propitious: Rockefeller purchased Barnard's own sculpture of Adam and Eve for Pocantico Hills, and also some one hundred objects of medieval art from the Barnard collection. The meeting was to be even more propitious for The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"I can think of nothing so unpleasant," John D. Rockefeller, Jr., once said, "as a life devoted to pleasure." Few rich men have ever felt so keenly the burdens of great wealth, or worked so hard to discharge its responsibilities. Frederick T. Gates, his father's senior partner in the Standard Oil colossus, had been the first to realize the implications of the enormous fortune that he saw rolling up "like an avalanche." Gates had warned the old man that he must distribute it faster than it grew, adding, "If you do not it will crush you and your children and your children's children." The junior Rockefeller, whose strict Baptist upbringing left him with little inclination for pleasure in any case, devoted his entire adult life to the unending struggle to distribute the avalanche.

These days the puritan conscience is in disfavor. It served and guided the younger Rockefeller through a remarkably productive life, nevertheless, and it did not prevent him from growing and changing with the times. Starting out with the inherited views of an economic royalist, he came around to a firm belief in the rights of organized labor. He progressed from narrow Baptist sectarianism to leadership of the movement for a united church. A lifelong teetotaler, he was at first a strong supporter of Prohibition; when he became convinced that the experiment was a failure and that its evils far outweighed its benefits, he published an open letter whose calm and cogent arguments gave considerable impetus to the movement for Repeal. Rockefeller never gave money to any enterprise unless he believed that it would somehow serve the public good. Wealth to him was a sacred trust; his own life a form of stewardship. In his younger years he seemed perennially anxious and trou-

bled, weighed down by the millions that threatened always to crush him. As he grew older he relaxed a little, and sometimes even gave indications that he enjoyed his life. He was a gentle, kind, and thoughtful man, with an iron streak down the middle.

The bright spot in Rockefeller's life was his marriage. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, the daughter of Senator Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island, was an effervescent and lively girl with a taste for art. When they moved soon after their marriage in 1901 into their new house on West Fifty-fourth Street, Abby improved the walls with Italian primitives from Duveen's. From Duccio and Piero della Francesca she went on to Goya and Chardin, and then eventually into modern art, becoming, with Lillie P. Bliss and Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan, one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929. Although her husband would eventually give \$5,000,000 to Abby's Modern Museum, plus the land on which it was built, he never really cared for pictures and modern art frankly embarrassed him. He found in modern paintings nothing more than "a desire for self-expression, as if the artist were saying, 'I'm free, bound by no form, and art is what flows out of me.'"

Like many an American millionaire, though, Rockefeller's indulgence of his wife's artistic tastes led to the development of his own. What he responded to in art was craftsmanship, painstaking attention to detail, and perfection of form – all of which he found in the Chinese porcelains that he began to collect in 1913. Porcelains had the formal purity, the cool impersonal perfection that he never found in paintings, and he soon became uncharacteristically passionate about owning them. When Duveen offered him first choice of the J. P. Morgan porcelains in 1915, Rockefeller picked out a million dollars' worth, and then had to go to his father for financial help. His letter justifying the purchase is revealing and touching:

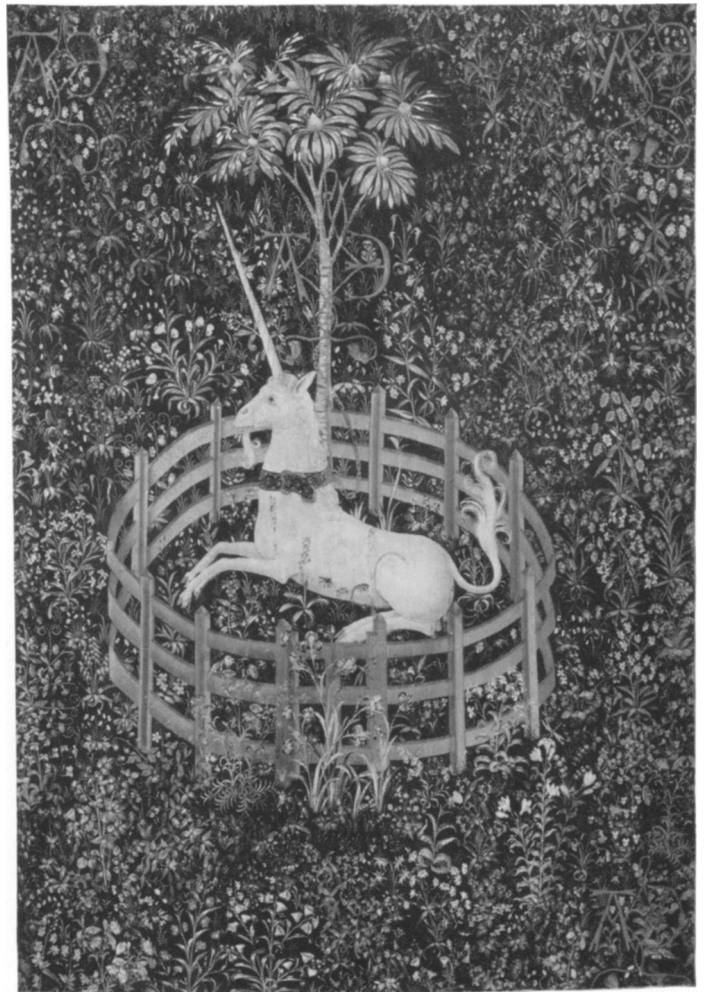
. . . I have never squandered money on horses, yachts, automobiles or other foolish extravagances. A fondness for these porcelains is my only hobby – the only thing on which I have cared to spend money. I have found their study a great recreation and diversion, and I have become very fond of them. This hobby, while a costly one, is quiet and unostentatious and not sensational. . . . Is it unwise for me to gratify a desire for beautiful things, which will be a constant joy to my friends and to my children as they grow to appreciate them, as well as to myself, when it is done in so quiet and unostentatious a manner?

Evidently he convinced his father, who gave him the money.

Duveen, always a subtle student of character among

the rich, also managed to interest Rockefeller in Persian carpets of the Polonaise variety – woven with gold and silver threads for the royal families of Poland. Carpets led on to tapestries. Rockefeller bought from Duveen a set of ten eighteenth-century tapestries from the Gobelin workshop, the so-called Months of Lucas series made originally for the son of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. Not long afterward, he learned from Welles Bosworth that a French dealer was in New York with a truly extraordinary tapestry series called *The Hunt of the Unicorn*. The most magnificent Gothic tapestries in existence, they were also among the best preserved – in spite of having been used for a period during the French Revolution to keep potatoes from freezing in a damp cellar. Since the early years of the nineteenth century they had hung in the château of the de la Rochefoucauld family at Verteuil. In 1920, the story went, Count Gabriel de la Rochefoucauld decided that he wanted to install a golf course. He was told that it would cost him a million dollars. The Count got his golf course, and Rockefeller got the Unicorn tapestries.

The Metropolitan could scarcely fail to notice such a collector. Rockefeller, who in 1919 had bought from the New York dealer Kelekian a huge Assyrian winged bull and a winged lion from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II and presented them, together with two ancient Near Eastern relief sculptures, to the Metropolitan, was elected to the board of trustees in the spring of 1921. He declined the election, explaining that it was against his policy to serve on any directorates other than his own philanthropic ones. Ever since his first visit to George Grey Barnard's cloister museum, though, Rockefeller's interest in medieval art and architecture had been growing stronger. The art of the Middle Ages appealed to him for many reasons. Like his Chinese porcelains, it was marked by superb craftsmanship. It was basically anonymous, expressing not the individual artisan but the spirit of the age. And the profoundly religious spirit of Gothic and Romanesque sculpture went straight to Rockefeller's Baptist soul. When Barnard offered in 1925 to sell his cloister museum to the Metropolitan for \$700,000, Rockefeller, who just the year before had made a substantial contribution to the Metropolitan's endowment for general operations, saw in this a new opportunity to advance the public good. He quietly turned over to the Museum shares of stock worth slightly more than a million dollars, and the following spring Barnard's museum, its exhibits rearranged and enlarged by some forty works of art from Rockefeller's own collection, reopened as a branch of the Metropolitan.



The Unicorn in Captivity, one of the Unicorn tapestries given to the Museum for The Cloisters by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in 1937

Rockefeller had always found George Grey Barnard a trifle overwhelming. The sculptor's personality was anything but quiet and unostentatious, and Rockefeller never quite knew what to say when Barnard started to talk about his triumphs, or to relate how Auguste Rodin, on first seeing the *Struggle of the Two Natures in Man*, had wept openly because he realized (according to Barnard) that he would never create anything so fine. Rockefeller declined to buy any of the medieval material that Barnard subsequently gathered together as a means of financing his *Rainbow Arch*, a gigantic new sculptural project; Barnard sold much of this second collection to the Philadelphia Museum, but did not live to carry out the *Rainbow Arch*. With Barnard more or less out of



Photograph of the Barnard Cloisters, taken by George Grey Barnard before 1925

the picture in 1926, though, Rockefeller began to take an active part in planning for the future of his gift.

By 1927, Rockefeller and the Metropolitan had come to feel that the Fort Washington Avenue site was inadequate. The neighborhood was changing, with new apartment buildings crowding in on all sides. It so happened that Rockefeller himself owned fifty-six acres of wooded land not far to the north, overlooking the Hudson. He had bought it in 1916 and offered it to New York City as a public park; the city had refused the gift because of the landscaping expenses involved. Now Rockefeller renewed his offer, saying he would pay for the landscaping himself, but requesting that four acres at the north end of the tract be set aside for a new museum building of medieval art. In 1930, Mayor James J. Walker's administration accepted the gift of what is now Fort Tryon Park, and The Cloisters found its future home.

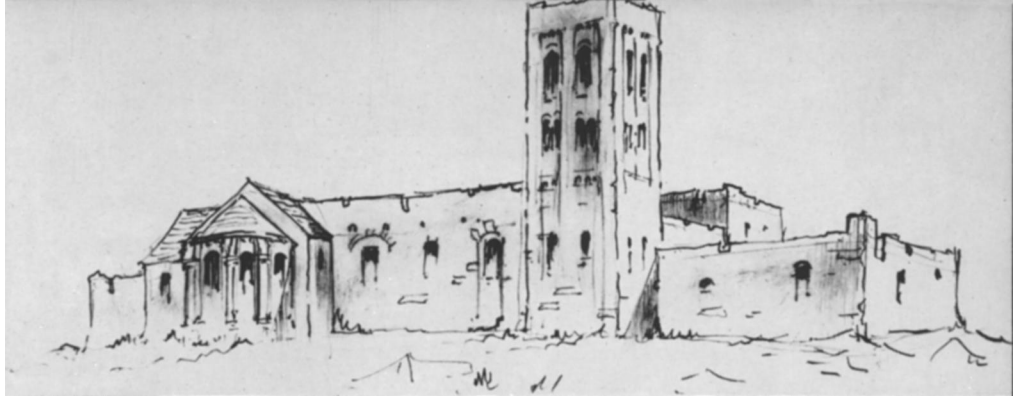
Charles Collens, the architect who designed the River-

side Church in New York, had been working for some time on a clay model of the proposed new medieval museum. The concept had already gone through several metamorphoses. Rockefeller originally wanted it to be modeled after Kenilworth Castle in England – he loved English history, and had often visited the famous old ruin celebrated by Sir Walter Scott. Collens's early sketches carried a strong suggestion of battlements and keeps, but in time Rockefeller had decided that such a setting would not be appropriate for works of art that were for the most part religiously inspired. After a trip to Spain and southern France, where he studied the old churches and monasteries in the region of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa, Collens set to work on a model that incorporated the general shape and structure of a medieval monastery without attempting to imitate any one building in particular.

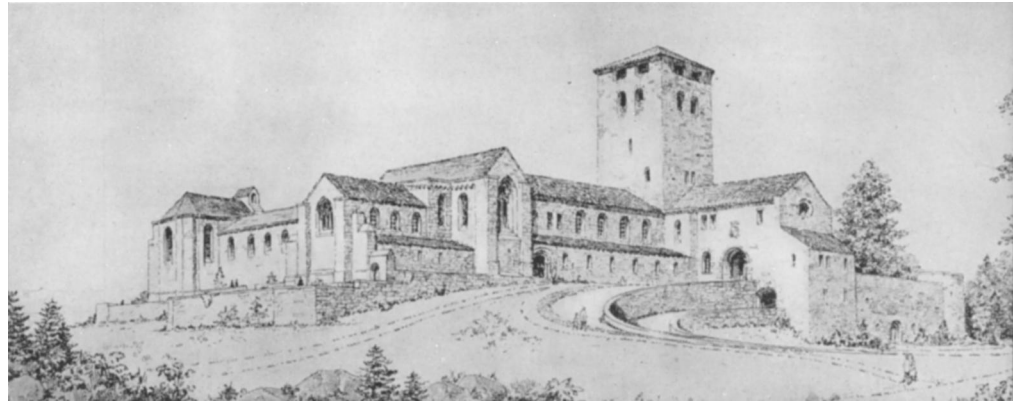
He consulted regularly with Rockefeller and with Joseph Breck, the Metropolitan's assistant director and

EVOLVING IDEAS FOR
THE ARCHITECTURE OF
THE CLOISTERS IN
FORT TRYON PARK

*Sketch of the monastery at
Cuxa, drawn by Charles Collens
in 1931*



*Sketch and clay model of the
proposed Cloisters building by
Charles Collens, about 1931*



*The Cloisters in 1941. Photo-
graph: Richard Carver Wood*



curator of Decorative Arts, who had a great deal to do with the early designing and planning. Rockefeller did not have a close working relationship with Breck. He was becoming more and more favorably impressed, meanwhile, with Breck's young associate curator, a recent Harvard graduate named James J. Rorimer.

Rorimer belonged to a new generation of curators—the generation trained by Paul Joseph Sachs. As art museums proliferated throughout the country, the lack of qualified curatorial talent had become increasingly acute. Princeton and a few other universities had departments of fine arts, but their graduates tended to become art historians or teachers rather than curators. Starting in 1923, though, Harvard instituted a graduate course designed specifically to train future museum curators. The students met once a week in Paul Sachs's book-lined living room at Shady Hill (the former home of Harvard's first professor of art history, Charles Eliot Norton), where they absorbed the most intimate secrets of the professional art world. Sachs was a remarkable teacher. A small, rotund, exquisitely groomed connoisseur who had quit banking as soon as he made enough money to indulge his passion for art, he talked very little about art history and a great deal about dealers, collectors, trustees, and how to get along with them. He took his students on occasional trips to New York and other cities, where they met dealers and saw private collections. He gave them all sorts of practical advice—"You'll be on your feet a lot, so get in the habit of moving from one foot to the other," he would say, demonstrating elegantly—and he always managed to talk about a painting as though it were the most exalted manifestation of the human spirit. "What he really did was teach you how to make the right sort of noises in front of pictures," one of his former students said. Sachs communicated more than his own enthusiasm, though, and his students—men like Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Philip Johnson, Preston Remington, and James Rorimer—went out to staff and eventually, in many cases, to direct the country's leading museums.

Rorimer had come directly to the Metropolitan from Harvard in 1927, at the age of twenty-two, beginning as an assistant in the Decorative Arts Department. He brought with him an extensive body of practical knowledge that he had acquired long before he ever left home to enter Harvard. His father, Louis Rorimer, was Cleveland's leading interior designer. The firm of Rorimer-Brooks employed a large staff of trained craftsmen who could make ornamental woodwork of all kinds, as well as the more sedate interiors of all the Statler hotels then sprouting up around the country—and Louis Rorimer saw to it that his son grew up knowing how to bevel an

edge and dress marble and match colors. James and his younger sister also accompanied their parents on frequent trips to Europe, where their father would point out in fascinating detail the aesthetic and architectural marvels of earlier centuries, and train the children's eyes to see what most tourists would miss. Somewhat later, as a student at Harvard, Rorimer would travel through Spain with Walter Cook, the Harvard art historian who later was instrumental in founding the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University; Cook was a great authority on Spanish art and architecture, and from him Rorimer acquired a knowledge and a love of the Romanesque style that was to be of great use to him later on. The truth of the matter was that neither Collens nor Breck had as sure a grasp of the historical and architectural requirements of Romanesque and Gothic architecture as Rorimer did.

Rockefeller noted this fact, and in the spring of 1929, when both Robinson, the director, and Breck, the assistant director, were away on vacation, he suggested to Rorimer that he go up to the future parkland and see if he couldn't string some lines that would show just where the various walls, ramparts, and approaches would fit into the four-acre site of The Cloisters. Rorimer did considerably better than that. With the help of Rockefeller's caretaker, who happened to be a brother of the movie actor Leo Carillo and who knew how they did things in Hollywood, he made a detailed, full-scale mock-up of the proposed building in wood and burlap, to the height of the first floor. Both Rorimer and Carillo prayed that it wouldn't rain before Rockefeller came up to see their handiwork. It didn't, and Rockefeller was elated. "Isn't it wonderful to have money enough to project a scheme in such a grandiose way?" he said, standing happily on a wooden rampart. The whole job had cost twelve hundred dollars—a good bit more than the string layout that Rockefeller had had in mind, and therefore something of a risk. Rorimer understood Rockefeller's eagerness to see something *built*, though, after months of working with sketches and clay models; he knew when to take risks, but he also knew just how far he could go.

The stock market crash that September threw a pall of uncertainty over The Cloisters project. Rockefeller did not lose interest in it, and he was gratified the next year when the city decided to accept his offer of land. No one had any idea how much money he was prepared to spend on the project, though, and there were indications that he sometimes had doubts about the necessity for financing a medieval museum in a period of severe economic and social distress. Breck complicated matters further by making frequent changes and additions to the plans. This situation came to a boil in the spring of 1933.

“Since Mr. Breck apparently regards the plans as still merely in process of development,” Rockefeller wrote to Collens’s partner, “would it not be wise and in the interest of economy to discontinue any further work on the final working drawings and full size details until Mr. Breck advises me that he has completed his study and is through making changes?” Breck dutifully signed a resolution drawn up by the trustees stating that no further changes would be made in the plans, and went off to Europe, leaving everything in Rorimer’s hands until he returned. He died a month later, while walking in Switzerland. His vast Decorative Arts empire was broken up into a Department of Medieval Art, the curiously titled Department of Renaissance and Modern Art, and the American Wing. The man named as curator of the new Medieval Department, which included The Cloisters, was twenty-nine-year-old James Rorimer.

Now began the most delicate and subtle phase of the whole affair. Rorimer had studied his man thoroughly. He knew that Rockefeller wanted to be personally involved with every detail of the planning and construction. He knew that there were to be no more changes in the plans. And yet Rorimer was deeply dissatisfied with certain aspects of the designs worked out by Collens and Breck. He proceeded, therefore, to work from *within* the proposed building.

George Blumenthal, whose wife had just died, was preparing to sell his house in Paris. Rorimer persuaded him to dismantle the music room so that four fifteenth-century windows and a twelfth-century doorway could

go to The Cloisters (Blumenthal agreed on condition that the transportation costs come out of the Cloisters budget), along with several other medieval works of art; the gift effectively got rid of four Collens windows and a Collens doorway that Rorimer disliked. Little by little Rorimer managed to acquire other architectural bits and pieces—old window frames, columns, even a complete refectory room—out of the modest purchase fund that Rockefeller had set up. He took great pains to keep Rockefeller informed of every development. Gradually, without ever suggesting a change in the plans, he managed to transform the museum in accordance with his own vision of what it should look like.

This vision was taking concrete form meanwhile in the basement of the Metropolitan, where a group of W.P.A. craftsmen had been put to work by Rorimer on an elaborate wooden scale model of The Cloisters. No detail was overlooked in this model. Each doorway, window, and column was exactly where it would be in the museum. Tiny pedestals supported minuscule plaster replicas of the sculptures that would be there, each one lit by concealed illumination. Collens was eager for Rockefeller to see the model, but Rorimer insisted that they wait until it was perfected. At last the job was done to his satisfaction. Rorimer arranged for Rockefeller and Collens to come in the next morning at nine o’clock, before the Museum opened. No one else was present in the basement room that morning when Rockefeller first saw the model. He walked around it slowly, leaned down to peer through a Romanesque portal towards a perfect replica

Scale model of The Cloisters, 1932





Model of the Cuxa Cloister, 1935

Photograph by James Rorimer of the Cuxa Cloister in 1938



of the Moutiers-Saint-Jean doorway that he had given to the Museum, and drew in his breath. "Mr. Rorimer," he said, in obvious amazement, "is this the way The Cloisters are going to look?" Rorimer's reply is legendary. "No, Mr. Rockefeller," he said quietly. "This is the way they could look if you wished them to."

Not long after this artful performance, Rockefeller set aside securities worth \$2,500,000 to pay the entire cost of constructing and maintaining the new Cloisters, and all uncertainty about the project vanished. Nor did his gifts stop there by any means. The great Catalan tombs of the Counts of Urgel, the Spanish frescoes from the monastery of San Pedro de Arlanza, the Pontaut Chapter House, the famous Chalice of Antioch, the thirteenth-century Virgin from the choir screen of Strasbourg Cathedral, the glorious Merode altarpiece – these and approximately ninety per cent of all the other works of art now on display at The Cloisters came either as outright gifts or through purchase funds that he supplied. Rockefeller made it absolutely clear, moreover, that the Museum was free at any time to sell or trade any objects he had given it if by doing so the quality or the balance of the collection could be improved. Furthermore, as Rockefeller wrote to him in 1936, Rorimer was never to "feel under the slightest embarrassment in giving me your frank opinion of any object belonging to me which I may submit for the consideration of the museum as a possible gift to it."

Rorimer took him at his word. Only once did he come

close to overstepping the bounds of propriety. Studying the Cloisters plans one day, Rockefeller noticed that one of the rooms had been designated as a “Tapestry Hall.” He asked what tapestries Rorimer planned to place there. “I was thinking,” Rorimer said, “of something like the Unicorn tapestries.” According to Rockefeller’s biographer, the millionaire uttered a shocked “What?”, and nothing more was said. The tapestries covered the walls of a room in Rockefeller’s house—a room that had become his favorite retreat. All the same, he presented them to the Metropolitan in 1937, and they were in place for the opening of the new Cloisters the following year.

There is no doubt that the personal relationship between Rockefeller and Rorimer played a major part in the creation of The Cloisters. No curator has ever studied his benefactor more assiduously, or made so few mistakes in dealing with him. Rorimer never asked Rockefeller for money; moreover, when they had agreed on a project

or a purchase, and there was a surplus afterward, Rorimer invariably made certain that it was paid back in dollars and cents. Like so many rich men Rockefeller had a streak of parsimony in his nature, and a mortal hatred of waste. On one of the frequent mornings that Rorimer stopped by at the Rockefeller house for breakfast, to discuss Cloisters matters before the working day began, Rockefeller handed him a letter that he had intended to mail; without a moment’s hesitation, Rorimer tore off the stamp and returned it to its owner. Rorimer countered his patron’s qualms about spending so much money for art in the midst of the Depression by reminding him of all the men he was employing on the Cloisters construction. He understood and respected Rockefeller’s extreme secretiveness where money was concerned, his reluctance to have dealers and other interested parties know about his plans and expenditures. Rorimer was secretive himself, and loved nothing better than to surround his activities with an aura of mystery.

The Cuxa Cloister in 1958



The two men also shared a totally absorbing interest in their joint vision of what The Cloisters could be, an interest that was not unlike the artist's passion for his own evolving masterpiece. Rockefeller came nearly every day to the building site, trudging through the mud and taking measurements with the tape measure that he always carried in his back pocket. For Rorimer, the project became an obsession. He talked about it so constantly that one Christmas his friends gave him a recording of their voices repeating endlessly, "The Cloisters . . . The Cloisters . . . The Cloisters . . ." His unceasing labors made Rockefeller respect him all the more. Years later, when Mrs. Rorimer was discussing with Rockefeller how hard her husband worked, Rockefeller said that he had been brought up to believe that a man's work came first and his family second. Whatever other qualities entered into their relationship – ambition, for example, or the mutual sympathy between two extremely shy men who were never altogether at ease in social gatherings – the main bond was that they trusted one another completely. Rockefeller had exceptionally high standards for the people he worked with, and Rorimer fulfilled every one of them.

When the new Cloisters opened to the public in the spring of 1938, their reward was complete. Praise and nothing but praise resounded on all sides. George Grey Barnard, who had died just the year before, would have been profoundly touched by some of the letters from ordinary visitors who wrote to say how delighted and in some cases how moved they had been by the atmosphere and the "spell" of the place – which seemed not so much a museum as a living evocation of the Middle Ages. The details – the warm gray of the Connecticut stone chosen because it resembled the stone found in southern France, the central tower that echoed the ancient tower of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa, the slight, deliberate irregularities of proportion that simulated medieval hand craftsmanship, the planting in the gardens, the superb placement and lighting of the works of art – all Rorimer's tireless attention to quality and authenticity added up to a remarkably unified effect, and one that most people found entrancing.

No one was more entranced than Rockefeller. He came again and again, informally, once arriving by an oversight on a Monday when the building was closed and going away again without a word to anyone – just as he had done years before in France when he went out to see the restorations in Versailles that he had financed, and, arriving too late in the day for admission, meekly turned around and went back to Paris. But neither Ver-

sailles nor Fontainebleau nor the Cathedral of Rheims – all of which Rockefeller had paid to have restored during the 1920s because the French government could not afford the work – nor even the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, on which he spent more than sixty million dollars, ever gave him more satisfaction than he drew from The Cloisters. In his last years he would still come in all weathers to Fort Tryon Park and stand on the ramparts high above the Hudson – looking across the river to the wooded cliffs that he had bought and presented to the Palisades Interstate Park Commission so as to preserve unspoiled the view from The Cloisters – and then he would go down through the Cuxa Cloister to his favorite room and sit looking for a long time at the Unicorn tapestries. "I hope you take as much pleasure and satisfaction in The Cloisters, so largely your own creation, as I do," he wrote to Rorimer in 1951. "Both inside and out it seems to me as nearly perfect as a building and collection of this kind could be."

A year later he did his best to insure that perfection's permanence. Rockefeller had spoken several times of increasing his endowment of The Cloisters. The sum he had in mind had been the subject of much speculation at the Museum, with estimates ranging up to five million dollars. It turned out to be twice that. Early in 1952, Rockefeller transferred securities with a market value of ten million dollars to the trustees of the Metropolitan. There were no strings of any kind. The deed of gift stated that the fund was "available for use in the broadest way for any purpose for the enrichment and development, structurally or otherwise, of The Cloisters." It was, the Metropolitan's president said, "a superb and perfect document."

James Rorimer's father had also taken a great interest in the evolution of The Cloisters. He came many times to the site, offered a number of helpful suggestions, and eventually donated the furniture for the curator's office in the tower – made to his son's order by Rorimer-Brooks in Cleveland. At the formal dedication in 1938, Louis Rorimer said to one of the Metropolitan curators present that it was in some ways a pity that all this had come to his son so early, for nothing else in his life could ever match the satisfaction of being given the materials to create a masterpiece. The curator did not argue the point. But it was clear to a good many people even then that James Rorimer would not be content with a single masterpiece, and that his ambitions were already fixed on a loftier goal. At the age of thirty-three, though, Rorimer could afford to wait.

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