Progressive Arrangements:
Citizenship and the Modernist Museum at the Barnes Foundation

by

Grace Kuipers
Class of 2014

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Art History

Middletown, Connecticut

April, 2014
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Albert Barnes and the Promise of Formalism</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: The Barnes Foundation and American Citizenship</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the support of my advisor, Katherine Kuenzli. You have been an incredible source of inspiration since I sat in your office as a junior asking for suggestions for my final paper. Thank you for encouraging me to write a thesis, to apply for funding, and take this project as far as it has come. I am so grateful for the time and effort you have put into reading countless drafts and for your insightful feedback. Your high standards have truly transformed me as a writer.

Thank you also to Judith Gurewich, who funded the generous John T. Paoletti travel research fellowship in art history. With the help of this grant I was able to conduct original research in the archives at the Barnes Foundation. I am grateful to the archivists Barbara Beaucar and Amanda McKnight for their patience with me and their encyclopedic knowledge about the history of the Barnes Foundation.

To my parents, thank you for sending me to college and encouraging this project since day one. Mom, you have been with me every step of the way. Thanks for driving me to and from Philadelphia. And for the amount of time you have spent thinking, talking about, and reading this essay with me, I have no words. I am so lucky to have two parents who offer so much love and support.

I am indebted also to Professors Joe Siry and Amy Tang for their helpful comments and advice along the way. To my housemates and the ladies of 58 Fountain, thanks for listening to my dry-runs of presentations and musings about this project. You have all contributed.
Introduction

In 1942, thirty-one years after the wealthy chemist Albert C. Barnes began collecting artwork, *House and Garden Magazine* published one of the first extensive articles with photographs of his enormous collection of artwork at his gallery and educational institution in Merion, Pennsylvania.¹ The first few pages give a brief outline of his collection: it began as European and American paintings, and teaches a select group of students using the highly valued paintings inside. The article is illustrated by small, black-and-white photographs of some of the paintings as they are hung: close together, in seemingly careful, rhythmic clusters of frames, complemented by smaller works of craft. These images are captioned with descriptions of the arrangements, characterizing them as representing “bizarre color contrasts” or “power and simplicity” (fig. 1). The article soon moves into a full color spread describing the ways in which the arrangements might inspire a more tasteful interior for one’s home. One page reads, “Rooms that Glow with Color” and then suggests that the “subtle interplay of form and color holds many suggestions directly applicable to your home” (fig. 2) Glossy images and large text fill the subsequent pages with advice for home decoration and garden upkeep based on the private gallery and its surrounding arboretum. The article represented one of the only occasions in Barnes’ lifetime that the journalists had been allowed to enter and take photographs of the collection for a news article. Barnes was characteristically

² Albert Barnes to Henry Humphrey. October 7, 1942. Albert Barnes Correspondence, Barnes
aggravated when he read this review, however, writing, “what to do now I don’t know….I’m too damn disgusted. The article was to be quite different.”

Journalists and critics have consistently approached the displays at the Barnes Foundation with bewilderment. In them, American and European modern and early modern periods are displayed non-chronologically, around formal similarities, in what Barnes called “wall ensembles.” Beyond Barnes’ seemingly peculiar ensembles, most attention is given to Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works. One of the most significant collections of Parisian modernist painting, the Barnes Foundation boasts 181 works by Renoir, 69 by Cézanne, 59 by Matisse, and 46 by Picasso, among many others by famous European artists. These numbers are enhanced, however, by the Foundation’s collection of ancient, early modern and non-Western art. When, in 1991, the “Great French Paintings of the Barnes Foundation” were finally allowed to leave their home in Merion for a touring exhibit of that title so that the building could undergo renovations, they were not displayed as they had been against the burlap-colored walls of Barnes’ galleries, opening up commentary about their original setting. One journalist wrote,

Back in Merion, paintings cluttered the walls from ceiling to floor, creating an ambiance as hectic and haphazard as that of the old Paris salons. French masterpieces vied for wall space with lesser works by Americans and others; shapely iron implements nailed to the wall were intended to echo the formal patterns in the artwork Seurat's great "Models" hung over a doorway, so high up you practically needed a ladder to see it. This arrangement (or lack thereof) will once again prevail after the paintings return to their Merion home, which is closed for renovations.

In Washington, baroque excess gives way to modernist hygiene. There is something chilly about this show, with its neutral beige galleries and analytic approach to artistic genius. In order to convert loony Dr. Barnes's collection

---

2 Albert Barnes to Henry Humphrey. October 7, 1942. Albert Barnes Correspondence, Barnes Foundation Archives. (henceforth: ABC, Barnes)
into a lucrative mega-show, curators had to erase the feeling of the Merion cache, presenting it as a tidy spectacle with each masterpiece in its correct historical slot. The Barnes show has everything but the magnificent crankiness of Albert Barnes.3

Barnes, however, was far more than a crank. He thought carefully about each of his paintings and its placement in his galleries. In 1914, he wrote to his good friend Leo Stein, the expatriate art collector and critic in Paris, to tell him of the time and effort that he put into his collection. “I have read conscientiously practically every book on art that has been published during the last few years,” he wrote. “I have wandered through the [European] galleries with these books in my hands… I have lived with my...paintings as constant companions.” 4 Such conscientious and informed study is at odds with the popular view of Barnes as a “loony” and capricious collector. He developed an approach to the presentation of these paintings soon after he had commissioned and chartered a home for his collection in 1922, which was at the time limited to American and European painting. He wrote little about the reasoning for his formal displays that defied historical and geographical classification, but we know that he changed the positions of artwork frequently and thought carefully about them.5 When he died, he stipulated that the ensembles remain in their places, leaving us to wonder about the origins and rationale of this “curious” method of display.


4 Barnes to Leo Stein. July 17, 1914, ABC, Barnes.

Though we might think of Barnes’ approach as an eccentric and isolated pursuit, enterprises in art and theory around the turn of the century in Europe reveal striking parallels. The Folkwang Museum in Hagen, though it no longer exists in its original building, displayed collections until 1921 in ways that were similar to what one critic dismissed as the “intimate, charmingly shabby jewel box crammed with paintings and artifacts” in Merion. Founded in 1902, the Folkwang Museum displayed the art of the wealthy collector Karl Osthaus. He brought together his collection of contemporary art with non-Western pieces by creating spatial organizations that sang with unity of color and composition (fig. 3). Like Barnes, Osthaus commissioned a modernist decorative program around the showcase of his artwork. A closer look at the non-visual elements reveals deeper similarities: Barnes and Osthaus both attempted to connect music with their artwork, and both imagined workers as an important part of their audience.

Given Barnes’ interest in modernism, it is not surprising that the origins of his practices lie in Europe. Barnes saw himself as a pioneer in collecting Impressionist and Post-Impressionist work, writing that he was “almost alone in this entire continent in collecting paintings such as mine.” In Europe, however, the intellectual community defending abstraction through formalist art analysis was taking shape and powerfully influencing public taste and the art market. In this thesis, I argue that the ideas of viewership at work in Barnes’ galleries were not quixotic exercises in symmetry and room decoration, but rather that they engaged the European intellectual

---


7 Albert Barnes to Leo Stein. July 17, 1914, ABC, Barnes.
defense of modernism through formalism. Though we often see descriptions of the Barnes Foundation as embodying something that was, as *House and Garden* put it, “authentically American,” Barnes’ purchases, his wall ensembles, and their corresponding background experiences of architecture and music, can be traced to European modernist art criticism.

This concept of display and art viewership privileged a direct experience with the viewer that did not require the erudition of deciphering symbols and knowing history to discern the importance of a painting. Instead, no matter what the viewer’s background, a judgment could be made based on universal elements of line, light, color, space, and composition. The implicit politics of equality in this approach took on special meaning in the United States, where concerns about democracy in the progressive era were especially salient. Thus my argument extends also to analyzing the ways in which Barnes used modernist notions of viewership to promote specific ideas of citizenship in the United States. Barnes’ modernist installations were not havens for the elite, but rather tools to teach a public. In collaboration with his lifelong friend, the pragmatist John Dewey, Barnes developed a method of art viewership that was predicated on a commitment to creating the citizen-viewer, and thus crafting informed voting citizens.

Existing scholarly research on the Barnes Foundation does little to connect it to the intellectual conversations of modernism and citizenship. Closest, perhaps, is the chapter Jeremy Braddock devotes to Barnes in his 2011 book *Collecting as Modernist Practice*. Braddock brilliantly associates Barnes with a number of other loosely connected editors and collectors in America from the turn of the twentieth century.

---

until the early thirties. For Braddock, however, “modernism” was not about the European evolution of art criticism that would lead to its institutionalization, nor is it about its purported accessibility, but rather was connected to the psychoanalysis that Barnes used in creating literary references of the ensembles in place Barnes’ death. Braddock thus does not consider the citizen-crafting agenda at work in Barnes’ Foundation or its European heritage. Meaghan Granda Bahr’s 1998 dissertation, *Transferred Values: Work and the Work of Art*, does consider some of the political implications of Barnes’ theories of viewership, but highlights the ways in which Barnes and Dewey were interested in industrial productivity.⁹ Bahr focuses on Barnes’ sudden interest in American craft around 1930, a time period outside of the scope of my study. It is true that Barnes’ beginnings as a factory owner shaped the ambitions of his foundation, and true also that Dewey’s writing about direct experience can be connected to ideas of craftsmanship and labor politics. However, there is more to be said about this philosophy of education and its connection to democracy. Most importantly, Dewey’s mission was to create participating citizens and to defend educated democracy. Art, Dewey and Barnes believed, and specifically the proto-abstract aesthetic pioneered in Paris between 1880 and 1914, played a seminal role in that educative process. Mary Ann Meyers, in her lengthy biography *Art, Education, and African American Culture: Albert Barnes and the Science of Philanthropy*, traces the life of our compelling collector in a well-researched account of Barnes’ engagement with the African American community in Philadelphia.¹⁰ Like

so many other scholars, however, she focuses largely on the man himself, rather than the context of his important collection.

Existing work on museums, modernism, and citizenship has provided useful and innovative theories for analyzing the Barnes Foundation. Christopher Reed touches on the political implications of formalist art criticism in his connection of class-based politics to Fry’s writings and the work of his Bloomsbury group. But this method of criticism extended well beyond Fry and the Bloomsbury group, beyond painting, and, as I argue, beyond Europe, to the “experiment in education” undertaken by Albert Barnes in Merion, Pennsylvania. A more thorough account of formalist art analysis, its primary champions, and its related politics has yet to be undertaken. The connection between modernist art and its attendant museums and methods of display has been made by James Sheehan, Charlotte Klonk, and Katherine Kuenzli. Sheehan has traced the sharp distinction between the nineteenth century historicist museum in Germany and the modernist museum at the turn of the twentieth century. Klonk has written about the ways in which methods of display changed with modernism to encourage direct experiences with viewers. And Katherine Kuenzli has characterized the Folkwang Museum in Hagen as a modernist museum through a rigorous study on not only its artwork, but its methods of display,

---

architecture, and the literature that informed it.\textsuperscript{14} It is my contention that the Barnes Foundation, too, represents a modernist museum.

Carol Duncan has argued in \textit{Civilizing Rituals} that public art museums have the potential to impart very serious political values to their visitors.\textsuperscript{15} I extend this conversation to the Barnes Foundation by comparing the institution at Merion to American municipal art museums of the nineteenth century. These municipal art museums, I argue, took on very different civic objectives associated with cultural, rather than political, citizenship. Wendy Bellion has highlighted the importance of the citizen-viewer in her discussion of illusionistic art in the early years of the republic. Bellion argues in her book, \textit{Citizen Spectator}, that artists who created optical illusions in conjunction with Enlightenment philosophies of perception helped to shape notions of subjectivity and American citizenship by crafting new ways of seeing for the American public in the early nineteenth century. Art built a kind of intelligence that formed stronger citizens. Part of Bellion’s analysis focuses on the ways that viewers were trained to engage the deception involved in trompe l’oeil paintings with the same discerning eye they would use to consider their own new government.\textsuperscript{16} Like the artists’ analyzed in Bellion’s book, Barnes saw the evaluation of art as a practical skill that would enhance an individual’s involvement in society and politics. But the political issues at stake and the representative strategies at work at the Barnes Foundation a century later were quite different. Barnes’ focus on race and class was a marked shift away from questions of political participation raised by the early

republic. And the forms of representation involved in modern painting worked differently on the viewer than an illusionistic, but deceptive, work of art.

The Barnes Foundation has published quite a bit of literature that has been enormously helpful to this study, even if it neglects the European modernist and American political dimensions of Barnes’ practices. From its founding in 1922, the Barnes name was attached to a number of books and articles and referred to a group of individuals affiliated with the institution. Within this circle were John Dewey and Dewey’s student Thomas Muro; Barnes’ philosophy tutor Laurence Buermeyer; Mary Mullen, a Foundation administrator; and Barnes’ Parisian art dealer, Paul Guillaume. The catalogue, Masterworks: The Barnes Foundation, published following the Foundation’s re-opening in 2012 at a new location, offers an authoritative reference for the ensembles in each room of the new building. The opening of the archives and the correspondence of Albert Barnes in 2012 has facilitated new work on the collection. I draw from not only his published writings, but also his correspondence reveals his engagement with major European collectors, critics, and American political and cultural figures. This thesis contributes a new understanding of the aesthetic, social, and political principles underlying Barnes’ collection. It draws on Barnes’ personal letters and documents as well as the literature produced by his circle of author-colleagues. Although the years when Barnes began collecting American craft in the early thirties until his death are important to the history of the Barnes

---


Foundation and even to his project of citizenship, they are outside of the scope of this project. I instead limit my study to the years between 1911, when Barnes began collecting art, until his turn towards American art in 1930. I focus, therefore, on the connection between European modernist art criticism, museums, and American citizenship.

In Chapter One, I discuss the ways in which Barnes’ methods of display and theories of viewership were informed by formalist art criticism that had taken hold in Europe. In 1904, Julius Meier-Graefe published his *Developmental History of Modern Art*, which challenged the engagement with the past that had been so central to the practice of traditional art history. Instead, Meier-Graefe focused unapologetically on the present, singling out Impressionist painters and modern craftsmen and designers who structured their compositions around purportedly universal properties like line, color, and composition. In 1910, Roger Fry published *Vision and Design*, in which the British critic argued, like Meier-Graefe, that form took primacy over content in the reception of a painting. He would also defend applied and decorative arts in the face of traditionally hierarchical scholarship on art that classified painting as superior. Fry’s formalist philosophies in *Vision and Design* would be the basis for his defense of the distorted forms of “Post-Impressionism” in his and all important “Post-Impressionist” exhibits in 1911 and 1912. In 1912, Barnes began collecting artwork, and his purchases dovetail with the aesthetic parameters and artwork presented in Fry and Meier-Graefe’s criticism. I then advance my analysis of their criticism to explain Barnes’ wall ensembles: formalist criticism argued that no matter the historical or geographical origin of a painting or work of
applied art, they shared underlying formal principles, including harmony, measure, and rhythm. Barnes thus arranged pictures in his collection in such a way that their composition and color echoed one another. The ensembles themselves were meant to exemplify balance and rhythm and thus constitute a perpetually modifiable and multi-part spatial work of art.

Formalist displays at the Barnes Foundation also took shape in Barnes’ political mission to attract “plain, ordinary person, with little schooling” to his courses. He wanted to educate his viewers, particularly the poor and marginalized, to critically assess a work of art regardless of their educational background. Precedents for Barnes’ association of aesthetics and social reform can be found in Fry’s criticism. In de-emphasizing narrative history in favor of pure sensory perception, Fry seized from elites a privilege of art appreciation that had long been reserved for those who had the requisite education. Modern art, then, came to represent a movement that was egalitarian and anti-institutional at its core.

I extend my reading of formalist literature to the connections Barnes sought with music and architecture. Barnes added decorative touches to the exterior of his building, and commissioned a mural by Matisse to adorn the interior. In his courses, he connected paintings through music in order to show connections along formal properties of rhythm and harmony. The connections between painting, music, and architecture were something that had been written about and promoted by Julius Meier-Graefe and, as Christopher Reed writes in Bloomsbury Rooms, was upheld by the Bloomsbury group. These connections lead us to the Folkwang Museum in Hagen for its similarity of intellectual inspiration. Osthaus, the collector that started the

19 Albert C. Barnes to Leopold Stokowski, March 18, 1925, ABC, Barnes.
museum, was deeply influenced by Julius Meier-Graefe. Thus we are brought to the concept of a modernist museum, a category in which I firmly place the Barnes Foundation.

In Chapter Two, I show how the modernist museum took shape at the Barnes Foundation in a distinctly American context centered around citizenship. The progressive era, as Dan Rodgers demonstrates, was largely born out of an attempt to secure America’s place as the holder of a “pure” democracy. While universal male suffrage had attracted the envy of European Progressives during the nineteenth century, by the turn of the century its reputation had been sullied by corrupt politics and the power of corporate trusts. Thus “citizenship” for progressives in the United States at this time meant largely the strength of its voting populace. Progressive reformers looked towards the poor and uneducated to improve participation and informed judgment. The connection between citizenship and art viewership can be seen most clearly in the writings of John Dewey, whose work Barnes aimed to put into practice. Although Dewey’s *Art as Experience* was not published until 1934, he had discussed these ideas with Barnes beginning in the 1920s, and Barnes implemented them in his Foundation. I first trace the ways in which Dewey’s ideas were directly informed by modernism: he agreed with the ways in which modernist theories of viewership and formalist aesthetics had taken shape at the Barnes Foundation. But he focused also on the individual and his or her method of judgment. Through his embrace of the scientific method, Dewey connected the judgment of art to the ability to participate successfully in a democracy.
But Barnes was not unique in his desire to shape viewers in ways that were informed by progressive politics; through his work at the Barnes Foundation, he participated in a broader transatlantic critique of nineteenth century historical museums. I discuss the nineteenth century historical museum in contrast to Barnes’ modernist museum. These museums operated around a specific notion of cultural citizenship and a definition of American culture that Barnes aimed to refute. This challenge took shape not only through his modernist tactics of display, but also through his incorporation of African sculpture. By including African sculpture within his “continuum” of design, Barnes rejected traditional Eurocentric narratives of the birth of American culture. In keeping with his emphasis on practice and his political and social engagement with contemporary culture, he drew associations between African art and African American art and citizenship. He worked against modernist primitivism’s implications that Black people were temporal Others, in an earlier stage of civilization than European countries of the West. He did so not only by arguing that African sculpture represented “a stage in advance” of European sculpture, but also by promoting the vigorous modernity of Black arts movements such as the Harlem Renaissance.

Chapter Two examines not only Barnes’ collections and displays in relationship to ideas of citizenship; it also explains how the building that housed the collection combines formalist aesthetics with principles of civic engagement. After buying the 12-acre Wilson Arboretum in 1922, Barnes commissioned Paul C. Cret, a French architect and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, to design the gallery and its connected residence (fig. 4). The Beaux-Arts trained architect was well-known
for his civic architecture in the United States. He had worked on courthouses and buildings for bureaucratic alliances and had thought hard about the role of government and its attendant architecture. His language thus bespoke Barnes’ interest in forming active citizen-viewers. In the early twentieth century, the Beaux-Arts style had come to represent the unofficial architectural style of progressivism. However Cret had also designed traditional art museums from which Barnes sought so emphatically to distance himself. In Merion, Cret and Barnes and took careful steps to distance the Foundation building’s architecture from that of the nineteenth century municipal art museum and instead to align it with the idea and form of a modernist art museum. Though the Renaissance-inspired limestone facade and its use of classical orders might recall a municipal museum in the downtown area of a major city, its modernist decorative program, nonlinear floorplan, and domestic setting set it firmly apart. Cret thus reflected, in keeping with the Beaux-Arts tradition, the caractère of the Barnes Foundation on the exterior of his building.

Barnes did write in response to the *House and Garden* article that he was “sick and tired of being publicized as a person.” Trivializing the artistic undertaking that lies within the Barnes Foundation in favor of the individual behind it all, this and other articles focus on his horrible temper and eccentric habits. But the collection, displays, and architecture were much more programmatic and ambitious than has previously been suspected. Far from an isolated collector, Barnes formulated the aesthetic social and political ambitions of his institution in conversation with the most advanced thinkers in Europe and America.
Chapter One: Albert Barnes and the Promise of Formalism

Introduction

The paintings in the Barnes Foundation collection are particularly celebrated as major works of late nineteenth and early twentieth century art. Their arrangement into "wall ensembles" that have been frozen in place since the time of Albert Barnes’ death in 1951, however, has generally been dismissed by scholars as little more than quirky arrangements. The Barnes Foundation has done little to demystify the organization of these wall ensembles or to dispel the dismissive belief that, as one critic put it, "Dr. Barnes’ wall-pictures… express [a] child-like pleasure in symmetrical compositions."20 This chapter will argue that Barnes engaged scholars from abroad as he built his collection and in so doing, created modernist works of art himself. Barnes not only read the work of formalist critics in Europe, he also adapted many of their ideas: ideas that encompassed cutting-edge theories of artistic expression as well as a public agenda dedicated to changing the relationship between museums and viewers.

Barnes’ forays into aesthetics began before he had the idea to create the Barnes Foundation. At the factory where he made his fortune creating an anti-gonorrheal drug, the wealthy owner would set aside two hours of the eight hour

workday for seminars to engage his workers. Once he began collecting paintings, Barnes incorporated those works into his lessons. As he began reading “practically every book on art that has been published during the last few years… in an effort to find out what is a good painting,”21 he would teach works of aesthetics as well. In 1915, Barnes demonstrated his engagement with modernist aesthetics in his own work, “How to Judge a Painting.”22 The article represents the budding intellectual’s desire to participate in the scholarly conversation that he had encountered through his critic Leo Stein. While Barnes does not offer his own authoritative opinion on modern painting in the article, he does engage the contemporary critics upon whom he relied heavily for his own later volume, *The Art in Painting*. While Barnes’ sharp tongue left no author unscathed, he described Clive Bell as being “most helpful,” and credited Julius Meier-Graefe for initiating his interest in art criticism to complement his collecting.23 He wrote in 1923 that “for about ten years we have had constantly in the building modern pictures that would stand examination in the light of what we learned from… books like Roger Fry’s *Vision and Design*.24

This chapter seeks to connect important works of modernist art criticism circulating in Europe at the time Barnes was collecting European paintings to the theory of art viewership at work in the Barnes Foundation. Critics who defended modernist painting largely implemented formal analysis, arguing that the form of the painting gave meaning to a work of art rather than its content. This approach would have important implications not only for the works that Barnes collected, but also the

21 Albert Barnes to Leo Stein. 17th July 1914. ABC, Barnes
22 Albert Barnes, "How to Judge a Painting." *Arts and Decoration* 5.6 (1915): 217-20.
23 Albert Barnes, "How to Judge a Painting." *Arts and Decoration* 5.6 (1915): 217-20.
ways in which those works were displayed. The same critics who promoted formalist art analysis also advocated an experience of viewing that incorporated architecture and music, as well. Theories of viewership that exacted the recognition of formal similarities between painting, sculpture, architecture, and music found material life in Europe in what can be called the modernist museum. In this chapter, I position the Barnes Foundation as a modernist museum as well.

**Barnes’ Engagement with European Formalism**

The story of the paintings at the Barnes Foundation begins in 1912, when William Glackens, an artist and friend of Albert Barnes, returned from Paris with paintings by Paul Cézanne, Edouard Manet, Paul Gauguin, and Edgar Degas. Barnes had sent the artist to Paris with a check of $20,000 to buy contemporary art. The young artist wrote of the exhausting process of “hunting up pictures,” but he returned to America with more than twenty works. As the dyspeptic chemist continued to look at the spoils of this reconnaissance mission, his taste began to transform. Later that year, Barnes himself travelled to Paris to continue where Glackens left off. In December of that year, he started an extravagant spending spree, buying seven Cézanne paintings in one week. On this trip he also encountered Gertrude and Leo Stein, the writers and art collectors who claimed to have discovered both Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. It was through these precocious socialites that Barnes

---

first purchased work by Matisse in 1912. Soon, his collection would be defined almost entirely by modern French paintings.

Barnes visited Europe at a crucial time in the evolution of artistic form. In 1912, the very same year that Barnes began to collect in earnest, Roger Fry organized his second Post-Impressionist exhibition in London. This exhibition had caused a stir in its initial iteration and was noteworthy for its creation of a new category of art that broke from the Impressionists of preceding decades. It put into a single category the works of Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, and Vincent Van Gogh. The 1912 exhibit, which was held two years after the original exhibit, included a few lesser-known artists under the category of Post-Impressionism. It added to its ranks artists such as Pablo Picasso, Andre Derain, Auguste Chabaud, Maurice de Vlaminck and Henri Rousseau (Fig. 5). Post-Impressionism was a term not just reserved for the generation of the 1880s in France; it instead characterized more broadly the reaction against Impressionism. Through their painting, Fry claimed, Cézanne, Matisse, Van Gogh, and Gauguin, among others, objected to the careful reproduction of natural phenomena and, as Fry put it, the “passive attitude towards the appearance of things.” Matisse was at the center of the show and, as in the earlier exhibition, Cézanne was seen as “the great and original genius… who really started this movement.” Fry used the formal structure of these works to justify their success: he privileged coherence of color, value, and space over the ability to accurately represent

---

31 From Fry’s Translation of Maurice Denis, “Cézanne - I” translated by Roger Fry, *The Burlington Magazine*, January 1920, 207-8. Fry translated Denis’ work on the artist in 1910, the same year that he placed Cézanne at the forefront of his first Post-Impressionism exhibit at the Grafton galleries.
reality. Critics of an earlier generation might have argued that the thick black lines surrounding Cézanne’s figures meant that he was unskilled and his technique childlike. In fact, during his lifetime, Cézanne’s work was largely rejected by the salons. Fry instead praised artists such as Cézanne and Matisse for their works’ “beauty of rhythm, of colour harmony, of pure design… [their] singular mastery of the language of plastic form.” Fry’s critical method lent credibility to the works of Cézanne and Matisse that Barnes was rapidly purchasing.

As Barnes amassed his collection in the early years, he also voraciously digested art criticism: not just that of Fry but also that of authors such as Julius Meier-Graefe and Clive Bell who, along with Fry, created a canon of formalist criticism. The formalists looked to the visual, rather than the iconographic or contextual elements to judge works of art. Complementing his forays into aesthetic theory, Barnes also read American pragmatist philosophers such as John Dewey, George Santayana, and William James, who all emphasized individual experience in the creation of meaning. Just as formalist critics rejected mimetic representation in favor of harmony and balance, pragmatists rejected the idea that thought should describe or mirror reality. Instead, for these scholars language and science were better tools for problem-solving. It is understandable that these strains of thought would be connected: both view the consideration of reality as something valuable in its process: the response evoked by formalist work comes from an active inquiry.

---

Thus Barnes not only collected art, but also read everything he could that might inform the viewership of these works. He wrote in 1914 to his friend John Johnson, “I’ve given more time and effort to trying to find out what is a good painting than I’ve ever given to any other subject in my life.” He developed, through the intersection of formalist criticism and pragmatist philosophy, a strategy of viewing that is still employed in his galleries, whereby viewers are encouraged to see unity in disparate works of art that are carefully juxtaposed against one another, and to actively participate in the evaluation of each work. Barnes drew connections between artwork from different geographic regions and time periods using the same formalist line of analysis that led to the acceptance of Cézanne’s paintings on the basis of their expressive distortions rather than truthful mirroring of reality. The formal qualities of the works themselves often provide the basis for their arrangement on the walls of the Barnes Foundation, in which relationships of rhythm, space, and color interlink individual artworks, regardless of their subject matter and place of origin. These wall ensembles, with their own logics of balance, rhythm and color, in fact enact the formalist ideals that informed many of the individual works.

Although Barnes’ modernist position would eventually take shape in an American context, the manifestation of formalist principles in both artwork and its display at the Barnes Foundation was part of a larger transatlantic intellectual community that was beginning to experiment with the potential of formalism. After Barnes graduated from University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1892, he spent five years studying at the University of Berlin, and returned to Germany in 1900 to study pharmacology at the University of Heidelberg. In Germany, he would have

been introduced to intellectual traditions that shaped the development of his collection.

As Charlotte Klonk and James Sheehan have pointed out, important museums in Germany at this time adopted a distinctively political role that was connected with modernism at the turn of the century. The German art critic Julius Meier-Graefe was central to this movement because he harshly criticized bureaucracy-minded museums and upended traditional art histories through formalist valuation. These newer museums, by embracing modernism, took an active role in defining political participation through their aesthetic principles.\(^{37}\) To Meier-Graefe, art history was a lamentably traditional field that served the interests of a nationalist government. His criticism was most famously articulated in *A Developmental History of Modern Art*, which he published at the beginning of the twentieth century. Barnes not only read this volume but also responded to it. In Chapter Two, I will explore more fully the political implications of Barnes’ vision and the ways in which the politics of the Barnes’ Foundation was situated in a trans-Atlantic conversation. But in this chapter, I will first connect the development of the modernist museum in Germany to the history of the wall ensembles of the Barnes Foundation through Meier-Graefe’s aesthetics. His endeavor was not simply an American invention but one that drew on traditions that flourished across two continents.

**The Significance of European Formalism**

The works of criticism by Fry, Bell, and Meier-Graefe that Barnes drew upon

---

to teach his students about art all departed from earlier nineteenth century practices of writing about art that had privileged content and subject matter. Nineteenth century critics had valued older paintings, such as British paintings of the natural sublime or paintings from the Italian Renaissance that involved Christian iconography for their use of culturally-imbued symbolism. John Ruskin, for instance, used morality to critique works of art based on their truth to materials and ethical content. Newer criticism, by way of contrast, used the artist’s ability to achieve aesthetic order and balance in a work as its basis for judgment, often eschewing the value of content. Works of art from around the world, regardless of their cultural context, could be judged on the basis of color, line, composition and texture. While taste and cultural meaning might change over time, for these formalist critics, aesthetic truths were universal.

Formalist criticism was popularized by Roger Fry and Clive Bell in their Bloomsbury Circle. These English critics drew on the writings of French painter and critic, Maurice Denis, who argued that the visual aspects of a work of art were more significant than its subject matter. In his pioneering essay from 1890, “Definition of Neo-Traditionalism,” Denis wrote that “a painting, before being a nude woman...was a flat surface covered with colors and lines arranged in a certain order.” Denis’ 1907 essay on Cézanne also proved important for Fry, who translated it into English. In his introductory note, he described the ‘new conception of art’ as one in which “the

---

decorative elements preponderate at the expense of the representative…the great and original genius…who really started this movement, the most fruitful and promising of modern times, was Cézanne.” Fry’s contribution was to apply Denis’ critical method to a broader range of twentieth century art, including Matisse, whose work Denis had found misguided. Fry instead saw

In the work of Matisse, especially, this search for an abstract harmony of line, for rhythm, has been carried to lengths which often deprive the figure of all appearance of nature. The general effect of his pictures is that of a return to primitive, even perhaps a return to barbaric, art. This is inevitably disconcerting; but before dismissing such pictures as violently absurd, it is fair to consider the nature of the problem which the artist who would use abstract design as his principle of expression, has to face.

Soon, the vocabulary inaugurated by Denis was being used to applaud newer artists. Clive Bell took Fry’s argument a step further, dismissing subject matter all together in Significant Form. Together, Bell and Fry began to change the way the anglophone world looked at modern art.

Relatively little has been done to define the amorphous term that formalism implies. I would suggest that ‘formalists’ make up a loosely-defined section of a broader school of modernist critics. This brand of criticism has not been comprehensively defined by any scholar, nor does it employ a term used by anyone at the time period it refers to. In fact, the kind of art it sought to analyze is similarly nebulous, making any attempt to identify it difficult. Jacqueline Falkenheim, in Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism has usefully traced Fry’s criticism to other critics such as Julius Meier-Graefe. Her key contribution is the connection

---

she makes to the exhibits Fry put on and the artwork that stemmed from it. She does not, however, consider the interest in applied arts and integration of art forms such as architecture and music that were so important to his writing. Similarly, Ken Moffett analyzes Julius Meier-Graefe’s contribution to formalist aesthetics but does not look beyond his interest in painting. Foregrounding this important aspect of modernist criticism are scholars such as Katherine Kuenzli and Christopher Reed, who argue that the decorative and integrated arts actually functioned centrally to the projects. Perhaps because of the relative scarcity of literature defining this category of criticism, little has been done to connect the Barnes Foundation to this incredibly influential critical tradition.

Formalist art criticism was foundational for Barnes’ “experiment in education.” The primary viewers of his collection were to be the students of his Foundation, which he chartered as an educational institution for “the plain people, that is, men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores and similar places.”

Formalist criticism did not just prompt the critical acclaim of many of the artists that Barnes collected, but it also spoke to Barnes’ mission. Fry and Bell’s Bloomsbury Group made important claims about the importance of overcoming class distinctions in art viewership that resonated strongly with Barnes’ belief that the cultural capital embedded in an elite background was not required to judge art. In a lecture in 1917, Roger Fry summarized what it was about modernist aesthetics that empowered poorer, uneducated classes: “The cultured have had leisure and time to acquire a knowledge of and familiarity with the art of all periods, and this knowledge is a social asset. So that to know the difference between

---

43 Barnes to Leopold Stokowski, March 18, 1925. ABC, Barnes.
Louis XV and Louis XVI furniture is one of the easily distinguished marks of a lady or gentleman—even more so in America than here.” 44 In contrast, understanding abstract form had little to do with one’s caste: “though it can be cultivated [it] is a grace— a grace that one’s scullery [maid] may have in greater degree than oneself.” 45 For Barnes as for Fry, the appreciation of art lay with the inner capabilities of the viewer rather than with accumulated knowledge that came as a product of his or her class. Art, in their minds, had a democratic potential that elite collectors had long denied.

As Christopher Reed has pointed out, the members of the Bloomsbury Group translated their aesthetic manifestoes into philosophies about nations, wars, institutions and hierarchies. Within the belief that art can only be read as the sum of its lines and planes lies an ideal of detachment from larger institutional structures. Reed writes, “In a socio-political order structured around aggression and acquisition, this insistence on the aesthetic as a separate realm is not apolitical. On the contrary, it may be seen as another form of wartime ‘conscientious objection’ deployed against capitalist imperatives to commercialize all aspects of experience.” 46 By making art only about what was on the surface of the canvas, the formalists were disavowing the ability of museums and other capitalist organizations to form the meaning of the work.

Museums, as government spaces, had come under attack at the turn of the

45 Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 11.
46 Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 14.
The work was important in the creation of a new, anti-institutional view taken on by art historians. Meier-Graefe based his entire history of painting on formal criteria, which he used to develop his own objective method for an emerging canon of modern art. He used line, light, color, and composition to formally analyze each work of art. While he championed certain artists such as Rubens for his contributions and painterly style, he left out other artists such as Giotto and Michelangelo because they did not succeed by the standards of his apparently objective evaluation. Meier-Graefe’s work at once develops a progressive genealogy of art, while at the same time establishing a universal criteria of line and color. As Robert Jensen has said, “Meier-Graefe brought to his history a comparative method which created broad contrasts… based on an experience of form.”

Meier-Graefe used this criteria to create an

---

47 Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World*, 167


entirely new narrative of modern art. Perhaps more importantly, though, he used this new narrative to create a pioneering rubric for art criticism.

Meier-Graefe also used impressionist artwork as a benchmark for the descent into abstraction. He wrote, nearly a decade before Roger Fry published *Vision and Design*, “All the more glorious therefore is the house which modern reverence has built up round them, the sanctuary to which the best artists of our own day resort to collect their strength for future works. Four mighty columns bear it aloft: Manet, Degas, Cézanne, Renoir.” Like Fry and Bell, Meier-Graefe celebrated Cézanne as a new innovator with respect to color and his mosaic-like use of color: “Cézanne’s system of colour may be compared to a kind of kaleidoscope, in which what we see has been shaken together, and so shaken that mosaic-pictures are produced, amazing in their vigorous contrasts of colour.” Meier-Graefe was among the first to point out a teleological relationship between the impressionists and newer, more abstract modern art. He was also among the first to point out the subtleties of their representational strategies that went beyond their adherence to physical likeness.

Barnes’ interest in these critics helps to explain the development of his collection. It is no coincidence that Barnes’ taste in collecting tilted heavily towards the artists celebrated by Fry, Bell, and Meier-Graefe. These authors helped to solidify the reputations of Renoir, Cézanne, and Matisse. Fry, in particular, was an important figure. Kenneth Clark has written that “insofar as the taste of an era can be changed by any one man, it was changed by Roger Fry.” As Barnes built his collection, he drew on the assessments of these experts to direct his purchases.

---

52 Meier-Graefe, *Developmental History*, 252.
54 Kenneth Clark quoted in Reed, *Roger Fry Reader*, 1.
It is no surprise, for example, that Barnes expended enormous effort across several years to acquire a work of art that Fry categorized as monumental and on par with the work of the Renaissance master Giotto. The Card Players by Cézanne marks one of the crowning achievements of Barnes’ collecting career (fig. 6). Fry wrote in 1927 of The Card Players:

Above all, the constant variation of the movements of planes within the main volumes, the changing relief of the contours, the complexity of color, in which Cézanne’s bluish, purplish and greenish greys are played against oranges and coppery reds, and finally by the delightful freedom of the hand-writing that he avoids all suggestion of rigidity and monotony. The feeling of life is no less intense than that of eternal stillness and repose. The hands for instance have the weight of matter because they are relaxed in complete repose, but they have the unmistakable potentiality of life.55

In his analysis, Fry celebrates Cézanne for the mosaic-like division of color and the balance in composition that was echoed by Clive Bell and Julius Meier-Graefe. Fry furthermore attaches a “feeling of life” to the color and “freedom of the handwriting” in spite of the lifelessness of Cézanne’s famously and artfully nondescript characters. Barnes would have encountered this specific text after his purchase of Cézanne’s important work, but admiration of The Card Players was ubiquitous before Fry’s assessment. Barnes had been interested in the piece since 1921, when he wrote to Charles Sheeler asking him to speak to Maurice de Zayas in Paris about it.56 When he finally acquired the painting in 1926, he wrote to his dealer, “I have no intention of announcing my purchase of the ‘Card Players.’ Unfortunately many American artists have seen it as well as some French visitors- so I imagine the news will be wide-

56 Albert C. Barnes to Charles Sheeler, May 26, 1921, ABC, Barnes.
spread within a short time. I don’t see how that result could be avoided.”

Barnes knew that this painting was sought-after, and Fry’s reading of the work merely confirmed its importance.

The aspects of Cézanne’s work that were most celebrated by formalist critics were perhaps best exemplified by The Card Players. The subject matter is clearly upstaged by its formal representation: the people inside the frame are not what draws our attention. Instead, the figures appear expressionless. The composition exhibits the balance and harmony that these critics admired by creating a stable arrangement of the men on either side of a central figure in white. The hues of blue and brown are symmetrically arranged to balance and unify the composition. The five pipes held by the men form a logic of repetition that mirror the men themselves. The patches of color on the wall appear as both individual swatches but also as a unified matrix as the colors repeat. If rhythmic composition is what marked a successful work to formalist critics, The Card Players is understandably one of its hallmarks.

By 1924, Barnes had moved from collecting based on formalist principles to writing about art, drawing on the ideas and methods that he had been employing in his factories. He wrote The Art in Painting so that an inexperienced observer might understand what it was that made each work of art so important. At its core, The Art in Painting is an analysis of painterly composition throughout Western history, but Barnes approaches artistic tradition through the lens of formalism, analyzing each painting through his key concepts of line, light, color and form. He argues in his study of Titian’s Entombment of Christ, for example, “One need not… be a Christian, or indeed have any special interest in the event itself, to obtain from the painting the rich

---

57 Albert C. Barnes to Paul Guillaume, Feb 5, 1926, ABC, Barnes.
human values, the nobility intrinsic to sympathy, solemnity, tragedy. These values are rendered abstractly by means of color, line, mass, space, all unified into a rich, rhythmic design.\textsuperscript{58} The decontextualization of semiotic values led formalist critics to champion modern art so that the representation of a bowl of fruit was impressive for the innovative uses of color and line, rather than in the meaning of the fruit itself. Barnes borrowed from the formalist critics an insistence about the importance of artistic technique. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
We miss the function of a painting if we look to it either for literal reproduction of subject-matter or for information of a documentary character… A real work of art may, incidentally, tell a story, but error arises when we try to judge it by the narrative, or the moral pointed, instead of by the manner in which the artist has used his materials—color, line, space.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Central to Barnes’ analysis of each work of art is his concept of “plastic form.” Plastic, to him, meant the flexibility of the ways that elements such as line, color, and space, could represent something. An artist might depict one subject a number of ways—his success depended on his use of these separate ingredients, which could be readily and objectively judged by a thoughtful and close-looking viewer.

\textit{The Art in Painting} borders on pretenses of scientific language to discuss the paintings. Barnes was explicit in his comparison of the disciplines. He wrote, “the artist is primarily the discoverer, just as the scientist is.”\textsuperscript{60} He believed strongly in the ability to apply the methods of science to his new passion. But \textit{The Art in Painting} is not alone in this vocabulary. The division of painting into its formal elements allowed formalist critics to apply what appeared to be an objective, scientific method towards

\textsuperscript{58} Albert C. Barnes, \textit{The Art in Painting: One hundred and Six Illustrations}. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), 105.
\textsuperscript{59} Barnes, \textit{The Art in Painting}, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{60} Barnes, \textit{The Art in Painting}, 13.
art. Roger Fry, like Barnes, had a background in science that fostered the development of a “scientific connoisseurship;” as in his unpublished 1894 essay, “The Philosophy of Impressionism,” he turned the appreciation of impressionist painting into an empirical judgment. The point of contact between scientific methods and modern art came from the perceived investigations into physical properties of light evinced by impressionist artists such as Seurat. Seurat, as well as other pointilists and impressionists, was heavily influenced by scientific approaches to optics, light, and color theory that were beginning to surface at this time period. But the guise of a scientific method also validated the perspective of these art critics. Robert Jensen writes, “In the hands of Meier-Graefe and other [proponents of modern art], the claim to the advance of knowledge, art as a series of investigations, as an enterprise of research, lent modernism a coherent, inevitable legitimacy.” The criticism and popularity of this art, then, relied on a scientific rhetoric that was equated with objectivity.

*The Art in Painting* also borrowed from the formalist tendency to draw historical continuity between modern painting and classic works. Barnes devoted nearly half of his book to artists working before 1850. He wrote, “In order to show the general nature of the traditions which have played an important part in the

---

61 “Scientific Connoisseurship” is a term often referred to in relationship to the Italian medical doctor and art critic Giovanni Morelli, whose two-volume study from 1874 offered an apparently empirical analysis of Italian painters. Morelli’s contribution was to conclude authorship with precision by looking at insignificant details that acted as an unconscious signature of the artist. See Richard Wollheim, “Giovanni Morelli and the Origins of Scientific Connoisseurship” on *Art and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1974), 177-201.
development of painting, and how they are utilized and modified by individuals, it is necessary to consider briefly the historical aspects. Old traditions constantly emerge in even the most recent painting, as, for example, Tintoretto in Soutine, the Persian Miniatures in Matisse”. The universal application of formal language to the analysis of paintings across disparate time periods is perhaps most clear in Meier-Graefe’s *Modern Art*. “We shall try in the sequel,” he wrote,

> to discover certain fundamental aesthetic elements of ancient art, in order to see where we have gained, where lost, and how it has all happened...We shall only linger at one or the other of the stages of this development, notably, at one of the earliest, because it offers the strongest possible contrast to our latest, and because, in spite of this, there are bold dreamers who would bind the two ends together.

The German historian would have his readers believe that there was more in common between ancient and modern art than they might think.

> Historical comparisons to old masters helped readers see the value of modern painting against a work of art that had universally accepted cultural value and to appreciate the ways that formal values are unchanging. Both Barnes and Meier-Graefe shared a belief in the origins of painting in ancient mosaics. The two both drew comparisons between ancient mosaics and Cézanne’s paintings. The division of color into individual planes was, for these critics, a sign of Cézanne’s genius: he had contemplated these ancient masters and achieved “style without the help of line, and solely by means of this magical mosaic of colour which... only expresses exact realities.” For Meier-Graefe and Barnes, the historical precedent that they saw in Cézanne made him an enlightened interpreter of tradition.

---

65 Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 37
Barnes’ conviction that there is a cohesion of formal elements across centuries is important for decoding the meaning of his wall ensembles. One early mention of the ensembles comes from a drawing Barnes made in 1927, describing the layout of Room 14 of the gallery (fig. 7). The sketch depicts several paintings from the Italian Renaissance, from the German Renaissance, as well as modern works. In this sketch, we can see that there is a rhythm to his ensembles, where artists of similar traditions mirror each other according to their placement on the wall. The arrangement shows a Durer symmetrical to a Durer, a Modigliani to a Lautrec, a Tintoretto to a Bellotto, and a Modigliani to a Soutine. The size of the paintings also appears to be important: the Durers on either end are the smallest, mirroring each other. The central painting, on the other hand, is the largest. The size and orientation of the painting were taken into account to form a coherent scheme of rhythm. The rhythm of this ensemble indicates that Barnes was attempting to create in his ensembles a work of art with the compositional unity that he so admired in individual works. This would have stood in stark contrast to the usual manner for galleries at that time, which advocated for plenty of space between each painting. But for Barnes, the power of the individual works gave way to ensembles, which for him, stood alone as works with their own rhythmic unity. Indeed, Barnes’ long-time associate and teacher at the Barnes Foundation, Violette de Mazia, wrote in 1983 that “the paintings and other objects… are so hung that… they offer examples of certain compositional organizations found also in individual paintings and of other aesthetic features of concern to the artist-

painter."^69^ Barnes held the wall ensembles, then, to the same formalist test to which he held the paintings that he carefully described in his book.

However, close consideration of the ensembles reveals that Barnes considered more than just the shape of the painting in his arrangements. The catalogue of the Barnes Foundation has noted that Renoir’s *Before the Bath* has been the center of several different ensembles. The ensembles themselves, though, differed greatly. Not only did Barnes, through time, expand the range of artists he was willing to compare Renoir with, but he also created vastly different complete works though his varying wall ensembles. In the first image of this painting, from 1927 (fig. 8), he draws comparisons of both composition and color in the symmetry he creates. He sets up Cézanne’s *Village Square* (fig. 9) from 1881 to mirror the same artist’s *Bottle and Fruits* from 1890 (fig. 10). The two clearly follow similar compositional logic: the canvas is divided in half horizontally, with a tall, protruding mass to the left. Renoir’s *Woman with Black Hair* from 1911 (fig. 11) is matched with Van Gogh’s *Thatched Cottages in the Sunshine* (fig. 12), from 1890. *Thatched cottages* was painted at a time when Van Gogh was reworking his palette: he was trying to capture the pinkish glow of the sun in southern France as it hit the countryside in the sweltering heat. His brush strokes are characteristic, and they help to capture the intense heat as it warps one’s vision of the landscape into a hazy image. That it would be matched with Renoir’s *Woman with Black Hair* is strangely appropriate: the pinkness of the photograph fits well with the colors of the afternoon heat. Her face is sweating and

---


dotted with light, her clothes slightly disheveled and her features dark, as if she herself might belong been in that very landscape in southern France. The diagonal of the ribbon in her hair is broken with the round knot in its center, just as the round sun meets the diagonal of the horizon. Renoir’s *Oranges and Bananas* (fig. 13) bears a similar composition to *Landscape* (fig. 14), where the canvas is divided in two, horizontally, just like the Cézanne paintings below them. The still lives and the landscapes mirror each other diagonally, and the sensual details of the French countryside remain on the periphery. As one, the ensemble functions as its own piece, drawing on artists with similar backgrounds and similar subject matter: portraits of women, landscapes of the French countryside, and still-lives of fruit on a table. But moreover, their formal qualities resonated with one another: the artists all used thick, broken brush strokes and a bright pastel palette. By 1928, Barnes had developed a method for implementing formalist criticism not only for collecting, but for displaying art; he had moved beyond the simple rhythm of paintings to create his own work of art that would require its own kind of interpretation.

Later, his ensembles, including this portrait, would begin to expand and transform. Photographs from 1928 show Honore Daumier and Edouard Manet but scarcely few of the paintings from just a year before (Fig. 15). In other ensembles, he included medieval work and non-Western artwork (fig. 16) (fig. 17). Beginning around 1930, he would expand his collection to include American craft. Tracking these ensembles is difficult due to the sparse nature of the recording: Barnes frequently used vague language and rarely allowed photographs of his collection. It is clear from the scant photographic evidence, though, as well as his letters about the
time he spent along in his galleries, that he changed the ensembles often.  

Recent readings of the current ensembles have suggested that the current ensembles might be even more complex, with hidden literary allusions and repeating motifs. Jeremy Braddock has pointed to possible literary connections that could be made between skulls and mountains in more than one of his ensembles. Cézanne’s Monte Sainte-Victoire and Road (1870s) is hung right next to El Greco’s Saint Francis and Brother Leo Meditating on Death in which Francis is cradling a skull. This visual comparison occurs in multiple rooms. In several rooms, the the skull is hung next to the mountain. Braddock offers a visual reading of Cézanne’s Mont Sainte-Victoire as a “cryptomorphic self-portrait... where the top of his head coincides with the peak of the mountain,” and argues that this repeated comparison rendered this reading ever clearer. This reading is an analysis of a later moment in Barnes’ forays into display and aesthetics than his earlier formalist arrangements. But implicit in Braddock’s analysis is the understanding that a work of El Greco and Cézanne might have some universal affinities worth comparing, that might illustrate something about one another. Though abstract, Cézanne’s depiction of a mountain might bear more meaning when paired with a medieval work to highlight the meaning it sought to isolate. Whether literary or formal, the effect created by the ensembles was one of a complete artistic work. In the earliest years of his Foundation, the walls of Barnes’ galleries embodied the rhythm, and compositional unity that European formalist critics found to be so meaningful in a work of art.

---

71 Barnes to Guillaume, September 16, 1925 cited in Dolkart and Lucy “To See as the Artist Sees”, 11.  
72 Jeremy Braddock. Collecting as Modernist Practice, 40.
Unity of the Arts and the Formalist Vision for the Modernist Museum

The meaning of the works and the practices of viewing they entailed would move beyond the wall ensembles. European criticism at this time advocated an interconnectivity of the arts that the visual and programmatic elements of the Barnes Foundation embraced. At the Barnes Foundation there exists a careful consideration of not just the individual works of art and their ensembles, but also the ways in which they might find analogues in architecture or music. Fry and Meier-Graefe advocated a reform of the way art was conceived, and with it, a reform of museums and the integration of painting, music, and architecture. Their writing has important parallels with the viewing experience Barnes created. Christohper Reed has pointed out that the formalist-inclined Bloomsbury group believed in breaking down the barriers between art categories and found, particularly in domestic spaces, harmony of sensation through architecture, music, and painting. Both Fry and Meier-Graefe found important comparisons between music and abstract art along formal lines, for example. In 1912, Fry coined the term “visual music” to refer to Wassily Kandinsky after seeing his work at the Salon D’Automne:

“one finds that... the improvisations become more definite, more logical and more closely knit in structure, more surprisingly beautiful in their colour oppositions, more exact in their equilibrium... they are pure visual music; but I cannot any longer doubt the possibility of emotional expression by such abstract visual signs.”

Meier-Graefe also used music as a metaphor for the artwork he was describing. A music fan himself, he invoked music to recall abstract forms in painting.

---

74 Jenny Anger, “Modernism at Home” in *Seeing and Beyond: Essays On Eighteenth to Twenty-first Century Art*, 214. Anger notes specifically Meier-Graefe’s interest in art, writing that the critic would paste concert tickets and musical scores in his personal diary.
referred to Edouard Manet’s “grander chords,” and Renaissance sculpture that “sings with a thousand voices, where before there was only one droning trumpet sound.”\textsuperscript{75}

These critics used abstraction of formal characteristics to draw a connection between music and visual art.

Barnes produced in his galleries at Merion the very experience of visual music that Fry and Meier-Graefe conjured in their writing. The accounts of how Barnes impressed artistic experience upon the students who eventually enrolled in his school are arresting in their reports of the ways that disparate materials were considered important. The placement of each work in relationship to other works was an important visual clue. So too was the architecture in which these works were displayed, and the atmosphere that surrounded their viewership. Music, although rarely written about, suffused the act of viewing and unified the sensory experience that Barnes sought. The art was not to be considered individually, but rather as part of a total artistic experience. Barnes insisted upon music being an important part of his institution. He had music played for his students, attempted to show similarities between the rhythm of the music and the rhythm of the painting. At one point, he even had the composer Nicolas Nabokov in residence as a Director of Musical Education.\textsuperscript{76} The purpose of the Main Gallery, as Cret wrote in 1923, was for musical performances. Barnes would often invite musical groups, especially the Bordentown choir, to perform here. In letters, Barnes claimed that the Barnes Foundation’s “interest in music is to show the relation between that and painting,” and that diverse music could elicit important comparisons: “our use of compositions extends from the

\textsuperscript{75} Meier-Graefe, \textit{Developmental History}, 110, 22.
\textsuperscript{76} Albert C. Barnes to Nicolas Nabokov, c. November 1934. ABC, Barnes.
classics to folk songs.” These comparisons were meant to “show, for instance, the kinship of Beethoven and Cézanne and Renoir; Gluck and Renoir; Picasso and Negro Spirituals, etc.” He found comparisons to his paintings in “Stravinsky and Debussy and hurdy-gurdy; Bach and jazz etc.” This combination was meant to combine these disparate works through formal qualities just as he did with the wall ensembles. It was also meant to add to the sensory experience. It produced for the viewers a new sensory experience around modernist aesthetics.

He had begun to consider music as a form of expression in the early 1920s, as he was forming the underpinnings of his Foundation. He wrote early on, “Of all the arts, music is the fittest for the expression of emotion…The fact that musical sounds may be arranged in the complex structures, capable of intellectual analysis and synthesis, gives to the feelings which music evokes a stability, an objective character, which removes them from the field of mere sentiment.” The ‘stability’ and ‘objective character’ that he saw allowed him to make individual comparisons. He would compare, for instance, Mozart’s Figaro with Cézanne and Giotto, arguing that there was “simple, rich melody, but complicated rhythm… competition between these two. Sharp beats. Straight, short curved, bigger lines, smooth, pauses between.” Line and rhythm were formal continuities between disparate mediums that had been touched on by the formalist critics of the turn of the century.

It was not just music and painting, however, that Barnes sought to connect. He

77 Albert C. Barnes to Patricia Hertzog, April 29, 1942, ABC, Barnes.
78 Albert C. Barnes to Henry Brown, October 16, 1950, ABC, Barnes.
79 Albert C. Barnes, Music (Reason in Art), c. 1920s.
80 Barnes Foundation Archive notes on musical comparisons.
was also interested in the ways that architecture could shape a the viewership of a work of art. If, for modernist critics, a work of art included the entire experience, Barnes was a veritable artist. After buying land in 1922, Barnes commissioned Paul Cret, a Beaux-Arts-educated Frenchman, to build a limestone neoclassical structure on a 12-acre arboretum in Merion, Pennsylvania. The architecture itself reflects many of the ideologies that Barnes found to be important in his project; he expected the architecture of the museum to complement his collection. In Chapter Two, I discuss the ways that traditional nineteenth century museums in America adopted linear narrative structures for their floor plans. \(^82\) The passageways of Cret’s structure, however, suggest a living relationship among the art of the past, the art of non-western countries, and the art of modern European masters. The mezzanine walkway (fig. 18), which houses figural sculptures in the opening of each archway, looks out onto the main gallery’s *The Dance*, as if these sculptures were dancing with the figures in the mural (fig. 19) (fig. 20). There is little narrative to the organization of the rooms: while one might expect concentrated rooms of a particular time period or country, instead the rooms emphasize the unity of all of these works in the artwork that the ensemble represents. Cret’s floorplan also marks an attempt to move the experience of the work of art outside of the individual object. The floorplan (fig. 21), in many ways resembles one of Barnes’ ensembles: it is symmetrical, with a large central space in the middle, on both floors, and matching identical appended rooms on either side. Cret designed the rooms specifically so that the paintings would

\(^{82}\) Arthur Fairbanks wrote, “the main floor plan shows the circuit of each department, in general chronological, by lines in the color assigned it, with arrow points showing direction.” in "The New Museum." *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 7.40/42 (1909): 43-45.
“harmonize” with one another by reducing ornament. The interior of the galleries were intended to resonate with the modernist theories of viewership that so informed Barnes’ collecting.

It is through the integration of painting and architecture at the Barnes Foundation that we are led to modernist theories of the decorative. In several instances, the walls of the Barnes Foundation are marked with the effect of modern painting. The connection between painting and architecture is one that was championed by many of the authors who heralded formalism’s modernist beginnings. Meier-Graefe, for one, celebrated artists who could successfully integrate architecture and painting. He traced modern painting to Byzantine mosaics, which he considered to be the apex of this standard. He lauded artists on the ways a work’s architectural setting might bring out its best qualities. Van Gogh, for instance, was an excellent painter but could only reach his full potential if exhibited in the proper architectural setting. It is therefore not surprising that in 1897, before Meier-Graefe published A Developmental History, he founded the Art Nouveau magazine Dekorative Kunst in 1897, which promoted a harmonization of art and all aspects of life, but especially painting and architecture. Roger Fry, too, saw the integration of painting and architecture as an important goal. The British authority on art had in fact started his career as a mural painter. Although primarily known as a critic of paintings, Fry also had a career in architecture. He designed the famous Durbin house, where

---

84 Kuenzli, 517.
86 Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 169.
Bloomsbury would have all of their meetings. The Bloomsbury group was known for their rejection of distinct categories of art. As Christopher Reed writes, “the later modernist insistence on the ‘purifying’ separation of the arts… could not be more different than the attitudes of artists in the first half of the twentieth century.” Fry would compare in his writing the ‘texture’ of architecture and painting, and discuss the two together. Fry and Meier-Graefe, among others, had taken an interest in what can be loosely identified as an interest in “the decorative,” whereby the interest in art is shifted away from illusionism and towards instead the surface of the paint. Groups such as Fry’s Omega workshops and the Nabis, of which Maurice Denis was a part, were known for their invocation of the decorative and its dissolution of the boundaries between fine art and decorative or applied art. It was seen as tied to architectural settings and the social function of art. In the Bloomsbury group’s Omega workshops, the boundaries between high art and decorative art were rejected in favor of Fauvist and Post-Impressionist inspired stained glass, murals, mosaics, and textiles, all of which situated painting in an architectural setting.

As Timothy J. Clark has pointed out, the term “decorative” was one that “was on everyone’s lips in 1891.” Often dismissed as secondary to traditional painting, Katherine Kuenzli has argued that for the Nabis, a group of post-impressionist artists in France in the 1890s, decorative arts represented an intellectually serious tendency

---

87 Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 169.
88 Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 173.
89 Fry, “Architecture in the Decorative Arts” 1921, 224 in Reed.
90 Katherine Marie Kuenzli. The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle. (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010).
in the development of modernism. Meier-Graefe, for his part, was a supporter of the Nabis and their decorative arts. Maurice Denis, in the same article that so influenced the development of formalist art criticism, became one of many to attempt to define what “the decorative” meant. For many artists, it meant the appreciation of art in part because it was easy to look at. It called for many of the same formal qualities touched on by Meier-Graefe and Fry: rhythm, harmony, and unity in color, line, and composition. As Clark writes, decorative art was “overt in its simplifications, ostentatious in its repeated patternings, unashamed to offer visual delight.” For Maurice Denis, non-western art and European medieval art were also included in this ‘decorative’ category. This interest in a broader understanding of categories of art is also what would lead to the greater praise surrounding African art and the primitivist modern art that stemmed from it in Europe. In the French edition of his article “Definition du Neo Traditionnisme,” he wrote, “The great art, that which is called the decorative, of the Hindus, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the art of the Middle ages and the Renaissance… what is it?” He was pioneering in his placement, as early as 1890, of non-Western art into his category of “the decorative,” which served to expand the category of “art” for his contemporaries.

Roger Fry would also invoke the decorative in his description of African artwork. In his craft-oriented Omega workshops, Fry would use African art as a point of comparison for its craftsmanship. As African Art became more popular, the meanings it embodied became more relevant to the interest in the decorative. African

93 Kuenzli, “Nabis and Intimate Modernism,” 158.
94 Clark *Farewell to an Idea*, 130.
95 Denis, *Definition du Neo Traditionnisme.*
art was, to these critics, characterized by its repetition of spatial masses and abstracted form. As I discuss in Chapter Two, it was not just within this decorative context that African art was appreciated. It was soon the subject of inquiry for scholars who compared it and even elevated it in relationship to European sculpture. Barnes would begin collecting African art in 1922, forming one of the defining characteristics of his Foundation. He installed the work in rhythmic arrangements as part of his wall ensembles (fig. 17). This move to incorporate non-Western art within the acceptable categories laid out by formalism is one that makes up a key characteristic of the Barnes Foundation’s history.

And so the architecture in Cret’s building is brimming with realizations of this modernist ideal. Barnes integrated painting with architecture in decorative touches that Denis would have appreciated. He had the portico covered in tile, in the form of a mosaic, to resemble an African textile (fig. 22 - 27). The visual complexity and rhythmic structure of the mosaic as well as its reference to African art had clear precedent in modernist decorative arts: mosaics were important art forms to decorative groups such as the Nabis and the Omega workshops. They had been lauded by Julius Meier-Graefe for their successful synthesis of painterly abstraction onto a physical space. Barnes also commissioned Jacques Lipschitz to create seven bas-relief sculptures to be placed within the limestone exterior of the building (fig. 28). The commission reflects Lipchitz’ continued interest in creating a sculptural equivalent to the Cubist paintings of Picasso, Braque, and Gris, who often took as their subject matter still-life objects such as clarinets, guitars, and other musical
Inside, as well, the integration of painting and architecture was carried out above the three arches spanning the windows of the main hall’s gallery (fig. 19) (fig. 20). After calling Barnes’ institution “the only sane place to view art in the United States,” Matisse wanted to leave Barnes with a site-specific mural that would straddle painting and architecture. By 1932, the French artist had created a triptych in three lunettes across the main gallery. Murals, like mosaics, were seen by modernist critics as paragons of the decorative combination of painting and applied arts. The Nabis, in particular, sought a single composition across multiple panels, just as we see in *The Dance*. The giant mural, which stretches across more than 15 meters, shows bright, flat swaths of color that repeat across the lunettes in an extremely simplified palette. Eight figures are delineated in pure, simple outlines and extend outside of the borders of the mural. Matisse’s painting moves with the limitations offered by the structure of the arches. Matisse’s connection to the decorative was explicitly referenced by Barnes, who wrote that “Matisse… is by temperament primarily interested in the decorative aspects of things.” This painting also embodied the modernist wish to connect music with painting: Matisse’s series of *Dance* paintings have been associated for their movement with musical works, especially Stravinsky’s *The Rite*

---

of Spring. La Dance II, his largest work yet, was inspired by The Dance, an earlier work that had been the impetus for his most controversial critical attention. Thus painting, architecture, and music came together on the walls of Barnes’ galleries to create an experience of viewership that was informed by modernist criticism.

The Formalist Vision of the Modernist Museum in Europe

Finally, these critics also called for a re-invention of the museum in modernism’s image. In calling for a connection of artistic forms, Meier-Graef was also imagining a different setting entirely for artwork. As James Sheehan has demonstrated, Meier-Graef is a key figure in the revolution that created modern museums in Germany. In his introduction to Modern Art (1908), Meier-Graef laid out a powerful philosophy that articulates the relationship between art and contemporary society. He bemoaned the conditions of alienation governing both the production and consumption of art in the modern world, arguing that the artist no longer knew for whom he is producing, and that art had been reduced to a commodity, an investment value in the hands of the modern collector. Meier-Graef sought a solution to this state of affairs by putting art in the service of industry, demanding that museums take the lead in this effort. This would demand change, he argued, for most museums were little more than cesspools of nationalism and bureaucracy. Meier-Graef demanded that more creative, progressive forces animate museums. As Sheehan points out in his assessment of these efforts, several

---

101 Sheehan, Museums and the German Art World, 150.
102 Sheehan Museums and the German Art World, 150.
museums developed that were meant to embody the spirit of modernism, not just through their collecting but also through their architecture and outreach missions.\textsuperscript{103}

Although quite novel in the United States at the time, Barnes’ commitment to the interconnectivity of the arts had clear precedent in Germany. The similarity between the galleries at Merion and other institutions in Germany that were experimenting with display of disparate objects is striking. Most noticeable, perhaps, is the overlap with Osthaus’ Folkwang Museum in the industrial city of Hagen. Katherine Kuenzli has pointed out that the Folkwang Museum in Hagen not only functions as a total work of art, but also the ways in which Osthaus was influenced by important European art critics at the turn of the century, most notably Julius Meier-Graefe.\textsuperscript{104} The Folkwang Museum operated with many, nearly identical tenets to Barnes’ ideology. Karl Ernst Osthaus, the founder of this museum, was, like Barnes, a private, rich collector. After inheriting a large sum of money, he conceived of a gallery that would display natural history, local painting, and Islamic art. But he was soon convinced of modern art’s value by Meier-Graefe’s criticism. He cancelled his previous commission from architect Karl Gérard in favor of the Flemish, art nouveau architect Henry van de Velde, whom Meier-Graefe greatly admired. The visual and programmatic similarities to the Barnes Foundation are compelling. Osthaus’ museum is not organized in a linear fashion, instead favoring rooms that were organized around color principles: one room would, for example, be unified by the bright greens of a fountain, a stained glass window, and paintings by Henri Matisse

\textsuperscript{103} Sheehan, \textit{Museums and the German Art World}, 150.  
\textsuperscript{104} Kuenzli, “The Birth of the Modernist Art Museum,” 513.
Osthaus also collected non-western artwork and would display it in rhythmic arrangements alongside his collection of European painting (fig. 3) (fig. 29) (fig. 30). The organization, then, begs for comparison with Barnes’ ensembles. Like Barnes, Osthaus was interested in more than just European artwork: he collected from all over the world and he collected objects that dated across many centuries. Furthermore, the integration of architecture with the works of art is important: van de Velde was known for his ability to incorporate the decorative. A mosaic by van de Velde himself greets visitors in the entrance vestibule (fig. 31). Meier-Graefe is here an important reference: his belief in the timelessness of the principles of mosaics, from the Byzantines to the present, no doubt influenced Osthaus, van de Velde, and, I suggest, Albert Barnes. Meier-Graefe’s writing on painting’s integration with architecture, as Kuenzli has pointed out, also influenced Osthaus. Kuenzli points to Meier-Graefe’s term Raumskunst, or spatial art, that included a decorative aesthetic. He wrote that art in museums should be experienced through all senses. Much like Barnes’ approach, Osthaus played music for his visitors and incorporated a music room in van de Velde’s design. The focus of all of the visual work in the museum was on line, color, and surface.

Osthaus also saw his museum as playing an important role in the community around him. Meier-Graefe lamented the passive role that most museums played, and, taking this criticism to heart, Osthaus saw his collection as having beneficial potential for the industrial workers in the town where the Folkwang resided. It is impossible to know whether Barnes visited the Folkwang. But in the similarities between the

---

Barnes Foundation and the Folkwang Museum lies a statement about the latent political power involved in modernist aesthetics. As I discuss in Chapter Two, the modernist museum engages spectators, and in so doing, translates modernist principles from criticism of two-dimensional works of art onto the museum itself.

Sheehan is right to point to the ways that the aesthetic of the artwork that is collected, much as the museum that shows it, is not apolitical. Julius Meier-Graefe shook German nationalists by establishing a new criteria for independent artwork that challenged their political preconceptions. And Roger Fy opened the appreciation of modern art to populations previously limited by their class and status. The Barnes Foundation, however, operationalized many of these ideas and impulses in the United States. The importance of formalist art criticism can be seen most obviously in the works of art that Barnes collected as a result of their influence. But it can also be seen in the balanced, rhythmic composition of the ensembles that arouse mystery in all of its visitors. As becomes clear in Chapter Two, however, Barnes pushed the political possibilities of modernism in new directions as he combined the insights of Fry and Bell with those of John Dewey. Barnes would thus create new ways of seeing for his underprivileged students and a truly unique experiment.
Chapter Two: The Barnes Foundation and American Citizenship

Introduction

When Albert Barnes created the Barnes Foundation, his goals went beyond the abstract formal principles that organized his wall hangings. Barnes intended his museum to shape viewers into educated citizens, which was a specific kind of politics not found at most other modernist museums. The commitment to modernism at the Barnes Foundation was clear, as the wall ensembles used principles of formalism to draw connections between line, color, and space. And the connection between art, music, and architecture was certainly born out of European modernist criticism. As demonstrated in Chapter One, these modernist theories had important political connotations: modernist artwork could be accessible to everyone, or so critics claimed, because it could be judged based on readily available cues. But the politics of modernism became institutionalized at the Barnes Foundation in unprecedented ways. Albert Barnes aimed to create educated and informed citizens who would provide a solid basis for local as well as national democracy. Working with John Dewey, he created an analytical approach whereby art theory and criticism were connected through the scientific method to public participation, thus creating a theory of art viewership that was at once modernist and predicated on the citizen-viewer.

Barnes’ commitment to educated citizenship is not surprising given the transatlantic conversation that was taking place at the turn of the twentieth century
among those who styled themselves progressives. Many in Europe had long looked to the United States as the beacon of democracy, because the country had introduced universal white male suffrage before the Civil War. England would not make a similar move until the twentieth century, and Germany would only extend such suffrage rights in the limited elections of the Reichstag during the late nineteenth century. However, as many of those Europeans who saw themselves as “progressive” visited the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they were horrified by the results of universal suffrage in cities throughout the United States. Poor immigrants had traded their votes for patronage from corrupt political machines in one urban center after another. Bad sanitation, ramshackle housing, and substandard schools were supported by the machine politics that manipulated the votes of the poor. Democracy needed to be improved if it was to regain the respect of these Europeans, and citizenship had to be reformed. It is little wonder, therefore, that Barnes embraced this mission and defined the progressive politics of his Foundation specifically around the issue of educated citizenship.

Barnes connected his modernist aesthetics to citizenship through his creation of a modernist museum, which he set up in contrast to an earlier, nineteenth-century model of the municipal historicist museum in America. These museums maintained traditional histories of the development of civilization and, met with the seeming threat of increasing diversity in urban centers, defining a specific and exclusive definition of American culture. Through his incorporation of African sculpture, Barnes worked against this narrow definition of culture. In connecting the African art

to African Americans and the Harlem Renaissance, Barnes promoted not only political citizenship for African Americans but cultural citizenship as well. His ideals of citizenship were expressed in both the collection of art at the Barnes Foundation and in the building that Barnes commissioned Paul Cret to design in 1922. On this visible face of the institution, Cret combined Beaux-Arts classicism with modernist decorative touches to suggest the Barnes Foundation’s forceful combination of progressive-era ideals of citizenship with modernist theories of viewership.

The Education of Albert Barnes

The political agenda of the Barnes Foundation, however, preceded Barnes’ commission of Cret’s building in 1922. It found expression in Barnes’ reform-minded policies for the factory where he made his fortune. He practiced racially progressive employment policies and instituted seminars to educate his workers who were, by and large, poor and illiterate. When the Barnes Foundation received its charter for the purpose of creating an art educational institution in 1923, Barnes described the background of his institution in The New Republic, a progressive-minded journal, and did so in a way that demonstrated how he had incorporated progressive political views into the actual practices of his workplace. He noted he had started his business in 1902 with nine principals: “five white women, three colored men, and one white man.”107 Of these, one was illiterate, and the rest (with the exception of Barnes himself) had limited education. His workers at A.C. Barnes and Company were hired from his previous company Hille & Barnes, where his workforce had included a dozen African American men at a time when very few

African Americans were employed in industry. Employment prejudice meant that few workplaces were integrated, and African Americans who were employed worked outdoors, cleaning streets or handling garbage. Under the roof of the chemical factory on Fortieth Street in West Philadelphia, Barnes offered safe and preferable work. Starting in 1908, he began to educate these workers, allocating two of the eight hours of each work day to the study of psychology and philosophy. Barnes flagged one of the cornerstone beliefs of progressivism when he argued that workplace democracy was intimately connected with enhanced productivity. He insisted that the collaboration of the workers was so strong that the company “never had a boss and… never needed one.” His was not simply an interest in a more productive factory, however. These disenfranchised people, Barnes hoped, might ameliorate their socioeconomic position through education. Furthermore, they would become more informed citizens through the power of education and art viewership.

That Barnes sought to empower the poor and uneducated classes in his factory and his galleries was not simply a product of his political beliefs. His upbringing was also crucial in shaping his belief in the power of education to promote social mobility and a broader social understanding. The factory owner himself had found success through an education that allowed him to overcome his lowly socioeconomic status. Born to a poor family in one of the worst neighborhoods outside of Philadelphia, the scrappy student managed to pass, at age twelve, an entrance exam to the prestigious

110 Barnes, “The Barnes Foundation.”
Central High School. Central was a public school where many students were adults, called their teachers “professor,” and took college courses. Despite being a part of an entering class where only twenty percent graduated and where the majority came from middle-class families very different from his own, Barnes managed to graduate with an acceptance letter to the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in hand. Though he had a partial scholarship, he also had to take on odd jobs such as playing minor-league baseball in order to pay his bills.

After graduation, Barnes moved back and forth between working for chemical companies in the United States and studying in chemistry graduate programs in Germany. It was in Germany that he came across the discovery of Karl S. F. Crede, a German obstetrician, that silver nitrate could prevent new-born babies from blindness due to gonorrheal infection passed in utero from mother to child. Before Crede could put a product on the market, Barnes and his colleague Herman Hille had sent circulars to doctors advertising the product and had obtained a trademark for the name. By 1903, they had rented out an old hotel on Fortieth Street as a factory. Although Barnes’ partnership with Herman Hille had dissolved by 1907, the Argyrol venture proved enormously successful, providing Barnes with the funds for many decades of informed spending.

While Barnes was in Germany, he was not only exposed to new discoveries in medicine, but also to an impressive set of social programs that Bismark had enacted to counter the growing influence of socialists. By the time Barnes arrived in

---

111 Meyers, Art, Education, and African-American Culture, 82.
112 Meyers, Art, Education, and African-American Culture, 82.
113 Meyers, Art, Education, and African-American Culture, 12.
114 Meyers, Art, Education, and African-American Culture, 27.
Germany, the German state had enacted insurance laws that covered workers in cases of sickness and disability and old age pensions that covered them as they grew old.\textsuperscript{115} Germany might lag in its expansion of the franchise into all arenas, but its legislation for the protection and well-being of its workers was impressive.

Barnes’ exposure to German social engineering, combined with his own disadvantaged upbringing, were clearly of importance as he provided the opportunity for the more advanced education for many of his workers that he hoped would lift them into the middle class. Much of his fortune went towards the African American community in Philadelphia, especially to schools. He formed a close relationship with the Bordentown Industrial School for Colored Men, for example, and often financially supported their various projects. He later connected this relationship to his love of African sculpture, which he displayed alongside his modern artwork. Through this curiosity about the African diaspora, he developed relationships with Black activists such as W.E.B. DuBois, and members of the Harlem Renaissance. He was a fierce promoter of Black intellectual life and artists.\textsuperscript{116} And at his death, he entrusted his art collection to Lincoln University, a historically Black college in Philadelphia. At the end of this chapter, I further discuss the ways in which Barnes’ investment in the Black community intersected with his art collection as he engaged the idea of “primitivism.” It was an investment that was related to his broader theories of citizenship and art that influenced the creation of the Barnes Foundation.

Barnes’ interest in progressive politics, however, and his belief in the power of education had another important source: his passion for an educated citizenship as

\textsuperscript{115} Rodgers, \textit{Atlantic Crossings}, 13, 36.
the core principle in progressive politics was rooted in his close relationship with John Dewey, whose writings he began to read in the second decade of the twentieth century. The process began in 1915, three years after Barnes had started to incorporate art into his factory courses. He enlisted the help of Laurence Buermeyer, a PhD student at Princeton, to tutor him in philosophy, and Buermeyer led him to Dewey. In Dewey’s text from 1917, *Democracy and Education*, Barnes found support for his belief that education was necessary for social reform. Democracy, Dewey argued, was predicated on the ability of its citizens to think independently. Herein lay the purpose of Barnes’ educational experiments with his factory workers. He wrote in 1920:

> my principal interest has always been in education, first for myself, then for those less fortunate ones around us, then in the education of the public in general… from the time I was eleven until now I’ve been vitally interested in education- particularly that kind of education that looks upon experience as the best teacher.\(^{118}\)

After Barnes read Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* in 1916, he enrolled in the philosopher’s seminar on social philosophy at Columbia at Buermeyer’s instigation.

The lifelong relationship between Barnes and Dewey that grew out of that seminar proved to be mutually beneficial. Barnes’ knowledge of art criticism introduced Dewey to the aesthetic principles and important artists he engaged in *Art as Experience* in 1931.\(^{119}\) Much of Dewey’s discourse on formal analysis would not have been possible without Barnes’ familiarity with extant literature and works of art.

---


As Dewey scholar David Granger has pointed out, it was Barnes who first introduced Dewey to formalist methods of art analysis, and Barnes who encouraged Dewey to elaborate on theories previously elucidated in *Experience and Nature* and *Democracy and Education* in his new work on art and aesthetics.¹²⁰ As a result, Dewey expanded his educational theories and their relationship to democracy to include an engagement not just with art, but specifically modernist theories of viewership. But this relationship cut two ways. In 1923, Barnes wrote a letter to William Glacken’s wife that summarized Dewey’s role in Barnes’ plans for the future. His Foundation was to be “the first attempt made in America to put into practical effect the ideas to which Dewey has devoted his life to working out.”¹²¹

I have pointed out the ways that modernism expanded the audience for art in Chapter One. In this chapter, I will highlight the ways in which Dewey’s theories of active viewership called on both modernist aesthetics and a participatory engaged citizen. For Dewey, as for Barnes, experiencing art, whether in a museum or jazz hall, was foundational for democratic society. Through an appreciation of artwork, viewers would learn how to participate in society and appreciate the work involved in creating art.

**Dewey, Barnes and New Directions in Modernism**

Both Barnes and Dewey would eventually diverge from European modernists in important ways. Still, much of Dewey’s work on aesthetics, particularly as it was expressed in *Art and Experience*, was borrowed from the theories of Roger Fry, Clive

¹²⁰ Granger, “A Scientific Method” 57.
¹²¹ Albert C. Barnes to Edith Dimock, February 19, 1923. ABC, Barnes.
Bell, and other modernist critics. Dewey certainly approved of the difference between mimetic representation and “aesthetic” creation. He quoted Fry on his distinction between “ordinary seeing” and “aesthetic vision” in painting.\textsuperscript{122} He wrote that

[Fry] makes clear.. [that] representation is not, if the vision has been artistic or constructive (creative), of “objects as such,” that is of items in the natural scene as they literally occur or are recalled. It is not the kind of representation that a camera would report…. Certain relations of line and colors become important, ‘full of meaning,’ and everything else is subordinated to the evocation of what is implied in these relations, omitted, distorted, added to, transformed, to convey the relationships.

Thus Dewey agreed strongly with the formalist tendency to privilege form over strict representation. He also agreed with the tendency to look for harmony, rhythm, and unity in works of art. As I have shown in chapter one, these principles guided Barnes’ artistic purchases of modern painting. The results of this guided buying were lauded in Dewey’s writing, as well: Matisse, Cézanne, and Van Gogh, were all noted. Renoir, the single best-represented artist in Barnes’ collection, was celebrated for his ability to abstract “voluptuous qualities of flesh” from the “conditions of the physical existence of nude bodies.”\textsuperscript{123} Dewey’s praise of the Renoirs no doubt validated Barnes’ commitment to collecting and displaying such a large number of Renoir’s fleshy nudes.\textsuperscript{(fig. 32)} And while he did not credit Fry, Bell or Meier-Graefe for their understanding of the coordination between painting, applied arts, architecture, and music, Dewey did believe in artistic experiences that incorporated different categories of art. He believed that music, painting, and architecture could all form a single

\textsuperscript{122} John Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience} (New York: Minton, Balch, 1934), 90.
\textsuperscript{123} Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 101.
Barnes shared Dewey’s rejection of the boundaries of a work of art. For both men, the meaning of the work was shaped by all aspects of the encounter: from surrounding objects and architecture to the color of the walls and even the smells and sounds present at the event of the experience. Barnes used this belief in summative experience, which incorporated all aspects of perception, to shape the meaning of a work outside of its frame.

Dewey also criticized traditional museums for many of the same problems cited by European modernists. As James Sheehan has written, by the 1890s, modernist intellectuals and artists had begun to critique existing modes of collection display in museums in Germany. Although nineteenth-century museums largely privileged historical teleology, the historical significance of a painting or an artist’s biography were irrelevant to newer critics such as Julius Meier-Graefe. Modernists believed instead that museums should focus on fostering creativity through aesthetically striking and ahistorical displays of artworks. Dewey too saw museums as being problematic for their inability to offer a direct sensory experience that connected with the viewer’s life. He wrote, “our present museums and galleries to which works of fine art are removed and stored illustrate some of the causes that have operated to segregate art instead of finding it an attendant of temple, forum, and other forms of associated life.”

Like Bell and Fry, Dewey rejected the idea that only experts could respond intelligently to art. Dewey and Barnes favored instead an

124 Dewey writes, “moreover, the separation of architecture (music, too, for that matter) from such arts as painting and sculpture makes a mess of the historical development of the arts.” Art as Experience, 230.
125 James J. Sheehan, Museums in the German Art World, 145.
126 Ibid., 150.
127 Ibid., 150.
128 Dewey, Art as Experience, 158.
experiential inquiry into each work. Dewey accepted the fact that existing museums were places of cultural hegemony, but his writing reveals a desire to reform the museum into a place of transformational aesthetic experiences for viewers. He wanted museums to be places where a person might judge a work of art through his or her sensory and emotional intelligence instead of an institution where people were forced to think in a certain way.

Dewey’s work on psychology provided a foundation for his theories on aesthetics. His beliefs in *Art as Experience* stem in part from his understanding of sensory perception. As early as 1896, he described how the complex interaction of stimuli from different sensory organs combined to create complete perception. However, his faith in the scientific method formed the basis for art appreciation and civic participation alike, a connection that would influence Barnes’ ideas on this issue. Thus Barnes wrote:

John Dewey’s philosophy of education rests on the axiom that the indispensable elements of the democratic way of life—scientific method as intelligence in operation, art, education, are all bound together in a SINGLE ORGANIC WHOLE.

The method by which art was evaluated was for Dewey and Barnes closely linked to the method by which scientific hypotheses could be evaluated. Barnes wrote about artistic appreciation in almost scientific terms: at the beginning of his book *The Art in Painting*, he outlined a method that bore striking similarity to the scientific method:

“The method comprises the observation of facts, reflection upon them, and the testing

---

of the conclusions by their success in application.”131 This theory of the method was also linked very much to Barnes’ conception of aesthetic experience, which privileged the experience of the individual.

In his belief in the individual’s method of judgment, Dewey broke from the formalists. Where Clive Bell and Roger Fry saw the ability to judge art as innate, Dewey saw a learned skill that could provide the necessary tools for an active and engaged citizen. And where Barnes and Dewey privileged the actual experience itself, the formalists saw the object as having its own intrinsic value. Barnes’ and Dewey’s privileging of the individual would have resounding political effects for their conception of the citizen-viewer.

Barnes came to believe that these European critics missed the context required to give art meaning and underestimated the importance of individual experience, past and present. Clive Bell, in Significant Form, had argued that the judgment and reception of art was universal. For him, an art object consisted of color planes that were perceived in the same way by all who saw the work. “The significant form,” he wrote, “is a combination of lines and colours that moves me aesthetically.”132 Dismissing the importance of an individual’s background, he claimed that “it is the mark of great art that its appeal is universal and eternal.”133 Bell was famously political, and he saw his assertion that art was only about harmony in color and line as a freedom wrested from institutions that traditionally reserved for themselves the right to give art meaning. He wrote, “to appreciate a work of art we need to bring

133 Clive Bell, Art, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934, original 1914), 33.
with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions.”

While Barnes would agree with the politics of accessible art, he favored an approach that considered more than the individual object’s universal appeal. The viewer, in Barnes’ and Dewey’s mind, was free to assert value.

With his or her own previous experiences, the viewer played a more active role in finding meaning in a work of art. In 1914 Barnes wrote to Leo Stein about Bell’s work:

For people who had imagined that a picture of a pumpkin is good if it looks like a pumpkin, it was a revelation to learn that this was not so, that contrarywise, it was good because it had Significant Form. If such a person was not satisfied with this and asked to have Significant Form explained, it was made known to him that certain rarely endowed persons knew what this was since their esthetic emotion was thereby stimulated.

He caustically summarized Bell’s argument as plainly stating that viewers would know if their aesthetic emotion was stimulated. Barnes further found Bell’s monumental piece wanting in its claim that form was universally accessible: Bell’s “rarely endowed persons” hardly amount to an inclusive public. Barnes also took issue with Bell’s inability to explain where an aesthetic emotion came from. He continued in his letter to Stein,

In all experience, as Professor Dewey points out, there is a double aspect. We are affected by an object and we react to it. We perceive something, and we do something; we then perceive something again- the outcome of what we did. The esthetic attitude, that is, is an active process, and if the fine arts are only specific and partial forms of the art of living, we must expect to find in them the motives, the purposes, the feelings, which underlie and animate life as a whole.

In this response to Significant Form, Barnes argues that the viewer and the art both

---

134 Bell, Art, 27.
135 Albert Barnes to Leo Stein, August 29, 1924, ABC, Barnes.
act on each other to form meaning. Furthermore, the aesthetic experience that comes from viewing a work of art is inseparable from other aspects of our life that might help us determine, on an individual basis, what is good art.

In 1924, Laurence Buermeyer published at Barnes’ request a response to Roger Fry’s aesthetic theory. It was called “Some Popular Fallacies in Aesthetics.” Central to Buermeyer’s critique was the discomfort with Fry’s claim that aesthetic analysis could be innate. Instead, said Buermeyer, it was a carefully learned tool. Where Fry had claimed that a baby might be capable of thoughtful evaluation of ‘significant form,’ Buermeyer argued otherwise on behalf of the Barnes school. He wrote, “[aesthetic imagination] is something accomplished, not something which is spontaneous, but which is ordinarily inhibited by the necessities of life.” Such a claim fell closely in line with Barnes’ vision of the judgment of art as a learned skill. Barnes saw art viewership as something that was more closely related to the scientific method than a spontaneous act of perception.

_Art as Experience and the Experience of Democracy_

Barnes’ statement that art evaluation and democracy were part of a “single organic whole” based upon the scientific method is indicative of the connection Barnes and Dewey sought to make between modernism and citizenship. Barnes and Dewey saw the intelligent appreciation of art as a gateway to individuality and independence of thought, a characteristic that was necessary for a citizen and that would contribute to the functioning of democracy.

---

137 Buermeyer, “Popular Fallacies,” 110.
Dewey’s emphasis on the individual had profound implications for the political ambitions of the Barnes Foundation. It was also a concern that fit well with the contemporary American cultural and political landscape. During the inter-war period, democracy was a key topic of discussion. American democracy seemed to be threatened by autocratic governments, especially the German government, that had wreaked havoc abroad. Journalists and commentators connected an educated public with an environment that would not allow autocracy to flourish. One journalist wrote at the close of World War I,

in a time of steam and electricity and popular education, when quick communications, the transmission of ideas, the intercourse of nations are making the world one, instead of a series of isolated and thought-impenetrable compartments; when the rights of the many, of the majority, crush the pretended sole authority of the autocrat, the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German absolutisms were doomed. The many have conquered the one.\[138\]

Herein lay the philosophy behind educating the individual to perceive from experience. With a strong and educated populace that could think independently, an autocrat, or any of the boss politicians who tarnished America’s image abroad, could never flourish. Teaching students to learn from their own individual experiences would lead to the kind of society that many Americans imagined and wanted for their nation at this time.

The greatest threat to this ideal would be the poor, uneducated people who did not have access to the opportunities that would allow them this independence of thought. Barnes wrote to a friend in 1925, just as he was establishing his Foundation, about the students he was trying to reach: it was the “plain, ordinary person, with

---

little schooling, whom we want to teach to use the qualities of mind.”¹³⁹ Barnes sought to offer these uneducated, underprivileged people self-confidence in their own analytical abilities. Through artwork, they could learn to look with scrutiny without literacy. A note by Mary Mullen recalls one worker, Alice, “who had difficulty understanding the vocabulary involved in art analysis and yet when we looked at the pictures she could point out many of the qualities we had been talking about’ and seemed to understand what Barnes would later call ‘the universal language of art.’¹⁴⁰ In 1942, he would argue that this skill was essential in order for a student to arrive at a “gateway of individuality.”¹⁴¹ The goal was to transform the poor, uneducated and reliant person to become an independent, engaged citizen.

Dewey famously wrote about democracy and politics in many works, including Democracy and Education, as well as in The Public and its Problems. He found it essential that individuals be able to assess their government: “By its very nature, a state is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for.”¹⁴² Dewey saw this scrutiny as something that was only accessible through education, writing that it was a school’s responsibility to make sure a person could “intelligently… recognize all his social relations and take part in sustaining them.”¹⁴³ For Dewey, art was one way of providing this education. Of art and literature he wrote, “they supply… organs of vision.”¹⁴⁴ By this he meant that learning to see art

¹³⁹ Albert C. Barnes to Leopold Stokowski, March 18, 1925, ABC, Barnes.
¹⁴⁰ Notes on “Alice” in A.C. Barnes Factory Class, c. 1920s, Barnes Foundation Archives, cited in Judith F. Dolcart and Martha Lucy, The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks 17.
¹⁴¹ Albert C. Barnes, “Dr. Barnes of Merion Tells His Story,” transcript of radio address on station WCAU, April 9, 1942.
¹⁴⁴ Dewey, Democracy and Education, 228.
could provide a way of thinking that could be extended towards other forms of analysis. He expected individuals to actively participate in governance rather than blindly accepting the voice of authority. Within the educational mission that Barnes crafted with Dewey was a connection to a fuller, more participatory, democracy. Dewey’s commitment to democracy would in turn form the basis of Barnes’ theories of viewership. If a student could see for his or her self that a painting by Matisse exhibited balance in composition and harmony in color, then this person might also effectively evaluate the strength of a political candidate.

**Museums and Citizenship**

Barnes was not the first to envision his museum as a venue for enacting a political agenda. Historically, as Carol Duncan has pointed out, museums have been used as instruments of political power.\(^{145}\) Particularly in the progressive era, museums across Europe and America took on activist roles. But Barnes’ ideas differed both politically and aesthetically from these institutions. At Merion, we can see the confluence of European modernist principles of display as well as Barnes’ vision of citizenship and a defense of democracy. If Roger Fry’s modernist “language of art” was, as he claimed, “a language which is universal, valid for all times and in all countries,”\(^ {146}\) it certainly took shape in very different ways in different historical, geographical, and political contexts.

The Barnes Foundation drew not only on European formalist criticism, but

---


also on museological practices developed first and foremost in Germany that would be influential to museums everywhere. While Barnes’ engagement with Parisian art and aesthetics is clear, his indebtedness to modernist museum practices in Germany has gone largely unnoticed. Nineteenth century Germany had witnessed what James Sheehan has called “the museum age,” whereby museums expanded in Germany to accommodate a need for a national cultural identity.147 These museums attempted to engage the public with artistic matters and lead “the Volk to a higher vision of life.”148 In doing so, they broadened accessibility to artwork and imparted specific values to the public. However, the details of the specific public they aimed to reach was not a concern for these museum leaders. While vague statements of informing the Volk made up their missions, a concern with broadening art access across class lines would be reserved for the next century.149

The turn of the twentieth century saw museums in Germany embrace modernism in ways that directly affected the role they played in their political arena. These museums were built in industrial towns while their nineteenth-century counterparts had arisen in large, stately cities. Their focus moved to educating poorer, industrial workers. The exhibition strategies, as Charlotte Klonk has pointed out, focused more on the immediate present rather than historical time frames. They were exhibitions that, like Barnes’ ensembles, valued the direct sensory experience of the artwork over the historical education needed for earlier styles of display based in chronological and geographical classification. The cultural capital that was required

of nineteenth-century museum goers was cast aside in favor of the modernist aesthetics that were purportedly universal. These modernist museums used these values in order to further their own political agendas.

In Hagen, Germany, for example, when Karl Osthaus hired Flemish architect Henry van de Velde to design the Folkwang Museum for his collection of modern art, he then used the museum to promote German leadership in industrial production. By focusing specifically on modern art, Osthaus encouraged the production of art in the present. He geared this production towards industrial arts, so that German products might benefit from the inspiration he provided at his museum. His nationalist agenda became even more pronounced as World War I approached. As Katherine Kuenzli has argued, after the German invasion of Belgium, Osthaus intensified his support for German artists during the war, defended German aggression, and justified his support of van de Velde by claiming the Flemish artist as racially German. Wartime exhibits served narrowly nationalist agendas, such as the display of Islamic art he organized in November 1914 in honor of the Ottoman-German alliance. 150

Osthaus’ notion of viewership was, like Barnes’, culled from formalist art analysis and modernist theories of critics such as Julius Meier-Graefe. Like Barnes, he collected French impressionist and post-impressionist works and displayed them alongside works from different time periods and regions according to formalist principles. But his political agenda was fundamentally different. Where Barnes was not quite so concerned with nationalism, Osthaus made it a priority.

Barnes’ political differences from Osthaus stemmed in part, though not wholly, from the different political world in which Barnes lived and their very

different notions of progressivism. As noted earlier in this chapter, Daniel Rodgers argues in *Atlantic Crossings* that the formation of American progressivism occurred through a dialogue with a parallel European progressive movement, especially in England and Germany, a dialogue sparked by a generation of American students, including Barnes, who studied and encountered progressive ideas at German universities in the late nineteenth century.\(^{151}\) And while American visitors to Europe admired the progressive attitude for dealing with the industrial working class, such as Germany’s insurance plans for its workers, European visitors to the United States, for their part, were interested in American policies of universal suffrage for males. German restrictions on suffrage, for example, meant that the representatives of the popular Social Democratic party could not be elected anywhere besides the Reichstag. In England, property laws excluded nearly forty percent of the electorate. The promised land of egalitarianism became a myth to which the United States was attached.\(^{152}\)

However, by the first decade of the twentieth century, Europeans had seen enough of the trusts and monopolies of the American financial landscape, as well as political corruption in cities where the poor had access to voting rights, that their admiration for a land of democratic promise had diminished.\(^{153}\) American reformers, stung by European criticism of corrupt democratic practices and concerned about the collapse of their political system, pushed back strongly against what they, and

\(^{151}\) Rodgers writes, “From a trickle in the mid 1870s to a broad, institutionally established stream in the 1890s, a generation of American students of economics and social science made their way to Germany for graduate study.” *Atlantic Crossings*, 62.

\(^{152}\) Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 36.

\(^{153}\) Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 43-44.
European visitors, saw as a threat to their ideals of democracy.\footnote{Milkis, Progressivism, 8.} As Sidney M. Milkis writes in the introduction to his collection of essays \textit{Progressivism and the New Democracy}, “[the progressive movement’s] central thrust was an attack on political parties and the creation of a more direct, programmatic link between the government and the people.”\footnote{Milkis, Progressivism, 8.} Thus progressive reform surrounded the notion of an empowered citizen who could wisely participate in governance. Powerful voices of progressivism encouraged Americans to register to vote, fight political corruption, and support the assimilation of immigrants. Changes to the constitutional framework reflected the expansion of the electorate’s power: the seventeenth amendment was passed in 1913 to establish direct election of U.S. senators by popular vote. And in 1920, the nineteenth amendment was passed extending to women the right to vote. But if an expansion of voting was to improve society, there was an agreement that America needed an educated, empowered citizenry. This definition of citizenship as the ability of an individual to participate effectively in American democracy is what drove Barnes’ mission. It was fundamentally different from the German concern with creating better craftsmen, a concern that is evident most clearly in the German modernist museum and Osthaus’ interest in creating better artisans and better German products.

Museums in the United States were a central site for the spirit of forging civic values, but not necessarily the defense of democracy. Starting in the 1860s, American municipal museums began to spring up in cities that also boasted the necessary wealthy individuals needed to buttress the pursuit of a cultural monument. A witness
to this phenomenon remarked: “For the people of our cities, having achieved city
halls, public libraries, union stations, and hotels with hot and cold water in every
room, have now determined that they want art museums, and having so determined,
are getting them with remarkable speed.” These museums formed a tradition of
display and aesthetic ideology that would stand in stark contrast to the modernist
museum. They aimed to promote an official definition of national high culture by
presenting European culture, specifically the art of ancient Greece and Rome and of
the Italian Renaissance, as American moral and philosophical heritage. These
museums were based on a specific historical narrative, and on the idea that the
beauty of these specific traditions had the power to shape moral values in their
citizens. By the end of the nineteenth century, major cities such as Chicago, New
York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Detroit had all built municipal museums around a
historical narrative of Western art.

Instead of focusing on shaping a sharp voting citizenry, American museums
frequently touted their ability to nurture “good taste” among their publics. Beauty
was seen as an important ingredient for the making of a moral citizen. Directors from
both the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Metropolitan Museum in New York
were committed to maintaining in their communities “a high standard of aesthetic
taste.” But as Carol Duncan has pointed out, this ownership of taste has served as a

---

Rituals, 48.
157 Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 49-55.
158 Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 55.
159 See Nancy Einreinhofer, The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy (London: Leicester
UP, 1997) and Carol Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, as well as Jeffrey Trask, Things American: Art
160 In 1904, as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston looked toward a new building, its director Matthew
Stewart Prichard, published a treatise on “Current Theories of the Arrangement of Museums of Art and
force of exclusivity in the face of increasing cultural diversity in cities around the turn of the century. She writes, “the social value of American museums depended precisely on their exclusivity, their ability to mark and maintain a gulf that, as the Times put it, divided the “Americans of education” from foreign immigrants.”

Elizabeth Grossman points out that the traditional floorplan of the Detroit Institute of the Arts came from a period in Detroit’s history in which American industrialists were increasingly concerned with promoting cultural assimilation. The decision was made by Wilhelm Valentiner, the director, to the dismay of his architect, Paul Cret, who had been interested at the time in modernist ideas of formalist display. When asked about the plan, Valentiner responded, “It should be remembered that the number of those gifted with the aesthetic sense is very limited and it is doubtful whether this can be taught… on the other hand, art as an expression of culture of different ages can be taught very well.” It was assumed that especially for the uneducated classes, a modernist method of display was less effective than a historicist progression. For Valentiner, the modernist impulse to teach aesthetic formalism was not the goal of the museum. It was instead to teach a story of the development of civilization, much like the museums of nineteenth-century Germany. It was a story

their Application to the Museum of Fine Arts.” While most of the document was about display, he also wrote about the function he believed museums should play in American society: “the aim of a museum of art is to establish and maintain in the community a high standard of aesthetic taste.” Beauty, these reformers believed, could be the most important ingredient for the making of a moral citizen. The Metropolitan Museum, as well, from its inception was aimed at “the education of the public and the cultivation in our country of a high standard of artistic taste.” See Matthew Stewart Prichard, “Current Theories of the Arrangement of Museums of Art and Their Application to the Museum of Fine Arts” in Communications to the Trustees, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mar 1904. Accessed via google books. See also The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (New York) Eighth and Ninth Reports, January 1, 1878, 23.

Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 57.


people needed to know to be civilized, but also to see American culture as the product of a very specific selection of civilizations. Museums in countless cities relied on floor plans that guided visitors through a narrative of civilization that posited the Italian Renaissance as its apotheosis. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, for instance, maintained a floor plan that was “chiefly devoted to exhibitions historically arranged.” The Egyptian and Japanese rooms start at the beginning, while the Classical and “Western” rooms come next on either side. Finally, paintings, which take up the largest section of the building, deal with “Western art to the end of the Renaissance.” The incorporation of Greek sculpture was also an important statement about the heritage of western political ideals. The Metropolitan’s handbook prefaced their discussion of classical works by speaking about the society’s emphasis on “individuality and democracy” as well as their commitment to “great artistic genius and appreciation of beauty.” Democracy was used in these narratives in order to form a definition of American culture rather than truly advocating for a cleaner functioning of politics. By contrast, the Barnes Foundation has scarcely any Greek or Roman sculpture, because it did not suit Barnes’ aesthetic tastes, and because he placed little value in such historical narratives or symbolic statements.

In attempting to characterize the origins of American high culture, these museums had no need for contemporary art or aesthetics. The art at these museums was, unlike the works at the Barnes Foundation, displayed individually against a spare background. As the director of the Museum of Fine Arts wrote, this was

because “objects placed close together are never seen by the casual visitor. He is induced to pass from one to another so rapidly that his eye conveys no accurate representation to his brain.” The focus was less on seeing formal affinities between paintings and more about the individual objects. Finally, these museums did not collect modernist or contemporary artwork, an important defining characteristic of the modernist museum. Modernity, for these more traditional museums, meant the political ideal of progress and a successful society, rather than artworks that embodied advanced formal and scientific principles. While many had begun collecting impressionist works by 1910, they avoided cubist, abstract, or social-realistic works of painting and sculpture.

**Primitivism and Cultural Citizenship**

Barnes challenged the definition of high culture offered by the nineteenth-century historicist museum by disrupting the teleology it presented. His wall ensembles were not chronological and had little to do with geographic provenance. But he also challenged its definition of high culture so as to extend cultural citizenship to African Americans. Barnes did not just engage the idea of civic participation in terms of creating educated voters, he also sought to legitimate the cultural forms of expression that might strengthen civic participation. Barnes sought to give African art a new kind of legitimacy. Very few American museums at this

---

170 Cultural Citizenship, as Renato Rosaldo defines it in his groundbreaking 1994 essay, refers to “the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense.” He argues that contrary to political citizenship, which confers the right to reside and vote, and economic citizenship, which confers the right to work and prosper, cultural citizenship offers the right to know and speak. Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy," *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 402-11. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 Mar. 2014.
time collected African artwork, and those that did excluded the objects from aesthetic consideration. The Cleveland Museum, for instance, collected African art as early as the 1920s, but incorporated it into its children’s museum.\textsuperscript{171} African art would not become a standard feature of American art museums with comprehensive collections, however, until the 1980s.\textsuperscript{172} Barnes’ incorporation of African sculpture into his collection was certainly one that was grounded in modernist literature. But it also took on special meaning in a country with a large African American population. By incorporating African sculpture into the category of ‘high art,’ he was validating the artistic achievements of a group that many saw as inferior. This valuation was grounded in modernist criticism that appreciated the abstracted representation of human forms and rhythmic repetition of geometric masses. Painters had begun to appropriate the style by 1906 in what was called primitivism. But the modernist primitivism did not, in itself, do Black people in Europe, Africa, or the United States any favors. In fact, it often posited Black people as opposite to modern by positioning it as modern art’s ancient ancestor, the product of intellectually inferior peoples.

Barnes countered these assumptions by not only positioning African sculpture as “a stage in advance” of European sculpture, but also by drawing a connection of artistic heritage between African sculpture and African Americans that was met energetically with the unmistakable modernity of the Harlem Renaissance.

It is easy to see why African art would appeal to modernists. For Roger Fry, Henri Matisse, Andre Derain, and other avant-garde artists engaging African art in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the non-illusionistic form of African art


\textsuperscript{172} Berzock and Clarke, \textit{Representing Africa}, 12.
was a paragon of their ideal of new form. Andre Derain noted, in a letter on African sculpture, “it is absolutely essential for us to break out of the circle the realists have locked us into.”

For Fry, in *Vision and Design*, African art exemplified his point that art can be powerful due to its form, no matter where it originates. Matisse also felt that the abstraction was admirable: “compared to European sculpture, which always took its point of departure from musculature and started from the description of the object, these Negro statues were made in terms of their material, according to invented planes and proportions.”

This flexibility of planes and proportions would be enormously influential to Matisse’s body of work: many of his portraits exhibit swatches of color with little depth that instead seem to represent planes. Proportions are distorted so that instead of a face, many of Matisse’s portraits look like the masks he collected.

Barnes’ introduction to African sculpture came in 1922 at the outset of a relationship with his new Parisian art dealer, Paul Guillaume. Guillaume had become the Parisian authority on the matter after he drew the attention of the Parisian avant-garde by displaying African sculpture in the window of the tire shop in which he worked. The sculptures had been mixed in with rubber shipments, prompting the budding collector’s curiosity. By 1914, he owned a gallery that distributed both African art and avant-garde paintings. When the two met in 1922, Barnes was instantly drawn to his collection, writing that Guillaume “rescued [it] from mere

---


174 typescript of nine interviews with Henri Matisse, 1941. Here, Matisse describes his first encounter with African art in 1906. cited in Flam, *Primitivism.*

175 Clarke and Berzock, *Representing Africa,* 111.
The American collector was greatly impressed with the extensive research on the regions and styles represented in Guillaume’s collection. Although artistic attention had been given to African art, scholarship was largely limited to work by intellectuals outside of France. Although it was new to Barnes, his interest in formal criticism as well as the link he perceived between African sculpture and African Americans made him an instant supporter. By December of 1922, Guillaume was the foreign secretary of the Barnes Foundation and the two were collaborating on publications about African artwork.176

In the literature about African sculpture published by the Barnes Foundation, Barnes situated himself in opposition to existing readings. The Foundation published *Primitive Negro Sculpture* in 1926, written by Paul Guillaume and one of Dewey’s students, Thomas Munro.177 The book was lauded as being the “first adequate and thorough-going discussion of the important subject of African art.”178 Drawing entirely from Barnes’ collection, Munro and Guillaume analyzed formal characteristics of work from different regions. Critique is meted out in the introduction to the “generalizations” rampant in extant literature about African art.179 The two authors even critique the racist assumptions embedded in most critics’ writing. Citing authors who believe African artists to be “incapable of profound conceptions,” they write of these statements that the book aims to “show their utter untruth.”180 They wanted to show that African art was to be read “not as a distorted

178 *Saturday Review of Literature*, December 4, 1926.
179 Guillaume and Munro, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, 5.
copy of a human body” but rather as “a new creation in itself, recalling the human form in a general way, but independently justified in its own internal logic.”\(^{181}\) The novel form of African sculpture was then posited as artistic genius rather than savagery, its artists brilliant rather than unaware of convention or unable to reproduce images naturalistically.

The formal success of the sculpture and masks was reason enough for them to be included in Barnes’ boundaries of “culture.” An Ivory Coast mask was considered a masterpiece for its sophisticated unity of rhythms, whereby the careful repetition of lines and shapes are interspersed with contrasting forms (fig. 35). Although it was asymmetrical, each part was “again related to every other by the rhythmic repetition of forms.”\(^{182}\) It was the perfect example of a “rhythmic alternation and reversal of masses with hollows and spaces,” which he noted was characteristic of “Negro sculpture generally” but also of “all powerful design.” Indeed, Barnes saw African sculpture as a better example of sculpture than what was produced by European modernists or Greek and Roman sculptors. He displayed very little sculpture at his Foundation that was not African. The little amount of European sculpture that does exist comes mostly from Jacques Lipschitz, the cubist sculptor. Barnes initially took interest in Lipschitz not for his sculpted works, but for his renowned collection of African art.\(^{183}\) The sculpture at the Barnes Foundation was a far cry from the ennoblement of a white marble lineage.

In this way, Barnes distinguished himself from the more traditional, American

\(^{181}\) Guillaume and Munro, \textit{Primitive Negro Sculpture}, 4.

\(^{182}\) Guillaume and Munro, \textit{Primitive Negro Sculpture}, 100.

museums that attempted to trace an artistic development. In the glaring absence of the
glowing white muscular bodies that to many signaled a period of heightened artistic
achievement, and in true modernist fashion, he instead included works traditionally
excluded from conventional developmental histories. In doing so, he made claims
about the intellectual capacity of ancestors of African Americans who still did not
have full access to citizenship in the United States. He challenged the boundaries of
cultural citizenship that many of these museums attempted to use in defining the
American populace.

But the modernist appreciation of African art was not enough to enfranchise
African Americans. Certainly, the connection was made between the artwork and
Black people, but many critics insinuated goals opposite to Barnes. Roger Fry, for
instance, speculated as to why “a people who produced such great artists did not
produce also a culture in our sense of the word.”

184 For Fry, the strength of the artwork did not necessarily represent a strength of intellect that would be required for
Fry to allow the term “culture” to be applied to it. The biggest challenge that faced
the presentation of African sculpture was instead its early placement on the Western
timeline. 185 As James Clifford has noted, many exhibits of African artwork functioned
by placing African artwork in a pre-civilized, ancient past to contrast with the
modernism next to it. 186 187 At the same time that African art was being considered for

187 The sculpture at the Barnes Foundation was initially believed to be from the fifteenth and sixteenth
century. It was later dated to the present. The Barnes Foundation was not exempt from much of the
rhetoric surrounding African temporality. What the Barnes Foundation contributed was the notion that
the first time as high art in its own right, it also was considered a derivative, ancient
Other to the modern European works that were so inspired by it. The Africa that it
represented was romanticized for being free from not only the shackles of capitalism,
but also the sophistication of modernity. It thus promulgated the stereotypes upon
which colonialism rested its ugly feet.

These issues were clear, for example, when Alfred Stieglitz became one of the
first in the United States to display African art for its formal qualities in 1914 at his
291 gallery in New York. The exhibit displayed eighteen works from Gabon and the
Côte D’Ivoire, all from Guillaume’s collection. They were displayed at different
levels, against planes of colored material (fig. 5). These planes were meant to
highlight formal qualities in a modernist strategy of display. Although the formalist
treatment of these works would have us believe that the artist’s background was
irrelevant, the exhibit nevertheless made claims about the inferiority of the Black
intellect: Marius de Zayas, who helped organize the exhibit, wrote, “the point of
departure...of our abstract representations are based on the art of that race, which can
be considered as being in the most primitive state of the cerebral evolution of
mankind.” De Zayas associated the African art on display with primitive
sensibilities, an association Barnes firmly rejected.

Barnes’ treatment of his African sculpture was different from his
contemporaries. Barnes was truly interested in the success of the works themselves

---

Black people in the United States could themselves be considered modern.
188 Marius de Zayas’ memoir explains Guillaume’s role in introducing African art to the U.S. art
market. See his memoir, How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York, (Cambridge, MA: MIT
189 Marius de Zayas Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art, exh. cat. (New
and not so much by the European work that would have been inspired by it. He was no doubt interested in the formal similarities between European painting and African sculpture, but he did not draw the same narrative of linear progression implied by de Zayas’ notion of a “primitive state of evolution.” Instead, African sculpture appears not just as an accessory to Western art, but rather as its own important kind of artwork. In the installation photos from 1928, we can see that the ensembles created around the African sculpture are meant to comment on the formal successes Guillaume and Munro wrote about in *Primitive Negro Sculpture*. The vitrine, today as in 1928, consists of two shelves with seven masks, divided by six figural statues and an ivory horn. Four smaller figural statues punctuate the top shelf as well. The intricacy of their form is highlighted by the differences set up by their visual comparison. Instead of showing a unidirectional evolution between African art and European modern art, Barnes created a new work of art entirely.

The political power of Barnes’ mission, however, was enhanced by his intersection with the Harlem Renaissance and his support of *contemporary* Black artists as they encountered the artwork in his collection. The Harlem Renaissance, as a Black cultural movement in the twenties, shared the ideological tenet with Barnes that artistic contributions would help to “uplift” Blacks in America. Through his art dealer, Paul Guillaume, Barnes met Alain Locke, the essayist and editor of the famous *New Negro Anthology*, in 1924. Several months later, Locke invited Barnes to a gala event, where he built a relationship with Charles S. Johnson, editor of the National Urban League’s *Opportunity Magazine*. He also met here Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen, and W.E.B. DuBois. In Locke and Johnson, Barnes found
support for his collection of African sculpture and a belief in the potential it held for Black artists.

Many leaders of the Harlem Renaissance felt that artistic contributions would work against the prejudice that African Americans faced in America. In 1928, James Weldon Johnson wrote an article entitled “Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist,” arguing that Black artists would save the reputation of African Americans in the United States. He wrote, “the stereotype is that the Negro is nothing more than a beggar at the gate of the nation, waiting to be thrown the crumbs of civilization.” But artistic contributions could combat this stereotype: “Through his artistic efforts the Negro is smashing this immemorial stereotype faster than he has ever done through any other method he has been able to use.” In a punchy and provocative conclusion, he wrote that African Americans were proving that they could be just as innovative and display just as much genius as whites: “I do not think it too much to say that through artistic achievement the Negro has found a means of getting at the very core of the prejudice against him, by challenging the Nordic superiority complex.” To this day, the Harlem Renaissance is credited with upending many of the stereotypes hurled upon African Americans as lazy and ignorant.

At this point in the early twentieth century, it was primarily literary artists who had received attention for their cultural achievements. Barnes recognized these authors as displaying a genius deserving attention as cutting-edge intellectual work that furthermore gave African Americans a voice in the United States. He wrote an

191 Johnson, ““Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist,”” 770.
192 Johnson, ““Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist,”” 770.
article for the May 1926 issue of Opportunity Magazine entitled “Negro Art, Past and Present” in which he spoke of the contemporary potential of Black artists. Though he spent little time addressing actual visual artists, he did commend Black authors and poets: “The modern literary movement among the Negroes is rapidly advancing… the Negro will be assured of the high place he deserves in American civilization.”

Unlike many who dealt with African sculpture, Barnes saw the art form as linked to contemporary race issues, and voiced progressive opinions about Black artists.

He used his platform of African sculpture to encourage Black painters and sculptors. Barnes hoped that his sculpture would be used to foster a sense of visual heritage among African American artists. Locke, too, saw cultural heritage as an important stepping stone towards a class of African American modernists. In May of 1924, Locke published an article “A Note on African Art” and wrote about the field of African sculpture. He spent most of his time discussing the African sculpture itself, but ended with a call on the effect upon African American artists: “it becomes finally a natural and important question as to what artistic and cultural effect [African Art] will have upon the life of the American Negro.” For Locke, the sense of a cultural past was particularly important for the strength of his renaissance: “If by nothing more mystical than the sense of being ethnically related, some of us will feel its influence at least as keenly as those who have already made it recognized and famous. Nothing is more galvanizing than the sense of a cultural past. This at least the intelligent presentation of African art will supply to us.”

---

195 Locke, “A Note on African Art.”
strength of their ancestors. This knowledge could allow African American artists to achieve a level of excellence that Barnes and Locke alike saw as necessary for their political success.

Interestingly, their sense of the past was quite at odds with the historical narrative of civilization championed by many more traditional museums. Rather than seeing African art as a sign of a primitive society and/or race, this past provided a connection to ancestors that strengthened the contemporary artistic expression of African American artists. It gave African Americans a sense of culture that could inspire equality with white artists who assumed that their own past was superior to that of African Americans.

To foster artistic innovation among Black artists, Barnes reached out to promising artists and offered fellowships to stimulate their success. Aaron Douglas encountered Barnes through Charles Johnson, whom he met at an Urban League convention in 1924. Barnes offered Douglas a fellowship at his Foundation and in 1928, and Douglas enrolled in a yearlong course of study. Douglas would later write, “gosh, but it is a marvelous place. He undoubtedly has the largest single collection of modern paintings in America and certainly the finest collection of Negro sculpture.”

Amy Helen Kirschke has suggested that Douglas’ work shifted in style as it was influenced by the works in Barnes’ collection. Earlier works from around 1925 show wood-cut style black-and-white prints that used an African American subject. In Roll, Jordan, Roll, the mouths of the figures are displayed similarly to a stereotype caricature, large and with exaggerated contrast (fig. 36). Head of a Man

---

196 Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance, 277.
with Cityscape, also from 1925, shows a man who is depicted in a style that appears almost caricature-like (fig. 37). However, later works appear to have taken on shapes that seem to be influenced by the sculpture in Barnes’ collection. His May 1928 cover for Crisis, The Young Black Hungers, shows the silhouette of a man against a background of pyramids (fig. 38). The eyes, Kirschke has pointed out, resemble a mask from the Côte D’Ivoire in Barnes’ collection. The pyramids also gesture at a conscious African heritage. His drawings would come to be the representative images of the New Negro Movement. Douglas’ subject matter was exclusively Black. Barnes advised the young artist to consider rhythm in his work. Douglas wrote about the inspiration he drew from his African heritage: although it would be “absurd to take African sculpture and literally transplant it and inject it into Negro American life, we can go to American life and get a certain amount of understanding, form and color and use this knowledge in development of an expression which interprets our life.” Although Douglas never wrote explicitly about the African sculpture in Barnes’ collection, he undoubtedly saw this collection and principles as offering inspiration to his own work. By fostering contemporary art making by African Americans, Barnes was not only attempting to extend cultural citizenship to African Americans, but he was also positioning them as a part of the modern movement, rather than an accessory to it.

Barnes thus used African art to challenge not only the traditional

---

199 Meyers, Art, Education, and African-American Culture, 143.
200 Meyers, Art, Education, and African-American Culture 144.
201 Aaron Douglas, Kansas City Call, November 4, 1927, reprinted from an article by Lester A. Walton in the New York Wild, cited in Kirschke, 47.
interpretation of African artwork, but the modernist one as well. He still relied heavily on the formalism that drew his interest initially. This interest allowed him to break from American museums that disseminated a dominant history of art, and support his palace of modernism at Merion. To be sure, he still employed romanticized generalizations about the “spiritual endowment” of Black people. But he also distanced himself from the racist statements that often accompanied primitivism about the inferiority of Black populations. By integrating himself with the Harlem Renaissance, he developed an inclusive notion of cultural citizenship that included African Americans as unmistakably modern.

A Democratic Architecture

It is fitting, then, that the architect Barnes commissioned to create his museum in 1922 was one who could engage issues of cultural citizenship as well as political citizenship. Paul Cret was known for his civic architecture, but he also has an appreciation for the forms of art that animated the Barnes Foundation, including African sculptures. The building Cret created in Merion in many ways seems like an institutional edifice, with goals of imparting specific cultural values to an American populace (fig. 4). Although it sits on a 12-acre arboretum in the Philadelphia suburb of Merion, the classical language and light limestone of the Barnes Foundation make it easier to imagine in an urban setting, perhaps near a town hall or public library. The wide steps to the entrance and surrounding ionic columns give it the grand dignified approach of a building that reaches out to a wide public. The stone, imported from France, announces a heavy monumentality with a smooth surface. The choice of materials implies a permanence amidst this natural setting, and the quoins at the
corners suggest strength and the importance of this building. The windows are large relative to the human scale of domestic windows, which are inset with relief panels that sit below them (fig. 39). The smaller windows indicate the non-gallery spaces behind them, such as a staircase. They are in keeping with the relative austerity of the building; moulding is limited to a simple band that marks the division of floors and two sculptural reliefs framing the upper story windows. The classical style appears again on the second level through the reiteration of the columns in pilasters above the entrance and again around the main portico.

Cret’s heritage as a Beaux-Arts student is important for understanding his commission in 1923. With a history spanning four centuries, the École des Beaux Arts in Paris taught a style that was based on a well-defined canon of historical styles rooted in formal classicism. The style was characterized by axial symmetry, the careful adaptation of historical principles, monumentality, and use of the classical orders. It taught a grandiose architectural style for public and institutional buildings, all the while maintaining the classical language that was so important.

It was a style that was used for many museums, civic institutions, and government buildings, and came to express the values of democracy and citizenship that were so associated with the progressive movement. But Cret and Barnes also incorporated elements that were not typical of more traditional civic institutions. The decorative program of the exterior significantly expanded and altered the definition of “culture” promulgated by nineteenth-century American municipal museums to include non-Western art and contemporary art-making. In both the architectural and decorative program, Barnes and Cret discarded established narratives of the history of
Western culture in favor of a synthesis similar to Barnes’ wall ensembles. Not unlike an ensemble that would juxtapose an early modern painting of a crucifixion with a contemporary painting by Picasso amidst a selection of African sculpture, the facade brought together classical architecture with modern sculptural reliefs by Jacques Lipchitz and representations of African art into a single composition. The inclusion of a decorative program that reflected the integrity of the purpose was in fact a concept Cret would have been familiar with. A key lesson of the Beaux-Arts school was the notion of caractère, whereby the exterior of the building reflected the building’s specific, general, or typological character.\textsuperscript{202} It was no doubt this theory of caractère that propelled the synthesis of classicism with contemporary and non-Western art. From the exterior, in keeping with the caractère of the Barnes Foundation, we see both the architecture of progressive-era citizenship as well as modernist decorative details to suggest the theories of viewership at work within.

Many of Cret’s buildings shared the Barnes Foundation’s monumentality and classical language. As a Beaux-Arts trained architect, Cret applied a classical style to commissions for civic architecture. He won many commissions for civic institutions ranging from the Pan-American Union building in Washington, D.C. in 1907 (now called the Organization of American States), to the Indianapolis Public Library in 1914 and the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1919 before designing the Barnes Foundation in Merion. Cret also designed the nearby Rodin Museum, in downtown Philadelphia, in 1929. Barnes’ progressive interests in democracy and citizenship thus fit well with

Cret’s existing works. In a curriculum vitae written in the early 1930s the French designer identified civic architecture as his primary interest: “the characteristic of this practice is the planning of important city improvements, the planning of government buildings and important memorial buildings.”203 Cret had firm ideas about the role of government and the architecture that served its purposes. Elizabeth Grossman has foregrounded the aspects of democracy and citizenship in Cret’s architecture, writing that his buildings were places where “citizens would be encouraged to participate pleurally in the work of governance.”204 The monumentality of his style bespoke the grandeur of civil government and public participation. He expected the greater public to interact with his buildings.

It might seem paradoxical that a modernist collection would be housed in a building that intentionally recalls historical styles. However, as David Brain has demonstrated, the Beaux-Arts style signalled the beginning of a discipline of architecture that would eventually pave the way for modern architecture. He writes, “although it appears as a momentary reversal of the process of modernization in American architecture, it was the keystone of the historical process of institution-building that made possible the construction of an abstract formal discipline and laid the foundations for the later reception of what is now referred to as modern architecture.”205 The Beaux-Arts style was linked to modernism in undeniable, if not straightforward, ways.

Other modernist collections, specifically in Germany, curiously took on

---

203 Cret in Grossman, Civic Architecture, xv.
204 Grossman Civic Architecture, xvi.
historical styles. The Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld was built in 1897 as a new form of museum devoted to the applied arts. Although it was a non-traditional museum focused on contemporary visual arts and contemporary craft, it was housed in a spectacularly imposing, Renaissance-inspired classicist nineteenth-century building (fig. 40). The striking modernist interior of the Folkwang, designed by Henry van de Velde, was also contrasted by its remarkably traditional exterior (fig. 41). Osthaus had initially planned the establishment of a natural science museum, and had commissioned the Berlin architect Karl Gérard to design the building. But around 1900, Osthaus discovered the work of the modern Flemish architect and halted Gérard’s construction. At the Barnes Foundation, however, the Beaux-Arts classicism punctuated with a modernist decorative program reflects the character of the interior of the building as well as Barnes’ theories of citizen-viewership.

Barnes would have known that the Beaux-Arts exterior had meaningful connotations in America at this time that were linked to progressivism and the City Beautiful movement. Authors have pointed out that the style took hold in the late nineteenth century in the United States. Its success can be traced to the Chicago Fair’s exposition of the White City. The exposition displayed a city comprised of Beaux-Arts architecture and holistic planning. Eventually, the Beaux-Arts style would take on a political slant, aligning itself with progressive movements and being the architectural language of choice for civic buildings erected during the progressive era. In particular, the City Beautiful movement, which aligned attractive cities with a more virtuous urban public, took as its unofficial style the Beaux-Arts tradition.

206 Kuenzli, 510. The building was designed by Karl Gerard, but Osthaus would halt construction and have Van de Velde design the rest after discovering his work in 1900.
Buildings erected in the service of this movement are almost uniformly of the Beaux-Arts style.\textsuperscript{207} Brain writes, “the success of the White city, along with the participation of architects in city improvement, served to link Beaux-Arts architecture both symbolically and structurally to the social and political aspirations of the progressives.”\textsuperscript{208} The style itself became instrumental in the creation of a progressive institution. Cret’s architectural language was certainly couched in a progressivism that accompanied the Barnes Foundation’s inception.

Cret had designed other buildings before the Barnes that also operated within this climate of cultural institutions working to impart progressive values upon the American public. The Detroit Institute of Arts, as I have mentioned, was in many ways typical of the buildings that housed nineteenth-century historicist art museums. Cret’s Rodin Museum in Philadelphia, for example, gestures towards the society that influenced it in its urban setting. It is situated on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia, which, as David Brownlee points out, is a site that instills its constituent architecture with meaning.\textsuperscript{209} It was designed as a part of the City Beautiful Movement to link Philadelphia’s town hall with Fairmount Park and the site of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In doing so, the parkway created a discernible axis that linked city government with the dissemination of culture. In the Rodin Museum’s

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{207} For further discussion of the way the Beaux-Arts style came to be closely linked to the City Beautiful Movement, which attempted to beautify cities with monuments and monumental buildings and used this architecture to promote a more virtuous public within urban populations see William H. Wilson, \textit{The City Beautiful Movement} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). Wilson presents the architectural movement as a combination of political and cultural forces that also attempted to shape a citizenry.
\textsuperscript{208} Brain, \textit{Discipline & Style}, 811.
\end{flushright}
vicinity is the Philadelphia Free Library, the Franklin Institute, and the Courthouse (Fig. 42). It is thus situated in relationship to other civic institutions.

Because the collection of the museum is devoted to a single artist, the floor plan is not divided into a chronological sequence of galleries. The spirit of Rodin’s sculpture, however, does much to align it with the established canon of Western art. Rodin was a naturalist with a keen eye for proportion and individual physical features. Cret’s exterior took every effort to reflect this caractère. The white limestone structure was based on the Musee Rodin at Meudon, near Paris (fig. 43). The statuettes that fill the aedicula in front of the Rodin Museum bespeak a Roman ideal of citizenship and governance (fig. 44). The dramatic entrance, large reflecting pool and two large staircases on either side of the entrance vestibule that lead up to the elevated structure remind us that the building is a public one. The interior has large hallways with vaulted ceilings, and floors with a geometric decorative motif (fig. 45).

Although the collection was narrower in time period than most traditional nineteenth-century municipal museums, the building’s context and its exterior reflect a similar aesthetic.

The Barnes Foundation is not wholly the product of this progressive-era style of monumental architecture. It bears marked and intentional contrasts to these more traditional monumental civic museums. The nod to the African artwork inside is surely an indication. The entrance portico makes decorative reference to the African Art in its collection (fig. 22). Two figures amidst the tile on either side of the door reference the Baule door that exists within Barnes’ collection, shown in the installation photograph from 1928 (fig. 23, fig. 17, fig. 46) Above, masks from
different regions punctuate a row of red tiles. As Barnes writes, they are “all from my collection.” At the top, a frieze shows four figures. Surrounding the “Barnes Foundation” plaque are two figures, based on seated Senufo figures from Barnes’ collection (fig. 24, fig. 47) Barnes’ efforts to include African art in a definition of “high culture” and the collection itself thus made up part of the caractère of the building.

The cubist reliefs on the exterior of the building also interrupt the historicist style. In fact, when in 1922 Barnes comissioned Jacques Lipchitz to create the reliefs, the French sculptor initially declined because he felt that his cubist style was unsuitable for the style of the building. But Barnes’ promise to allow complete artistic freedom convinced the French sculptor. The reliefs show interlocking planes and distorted, geometric forms that are barely representational (fig. 28). His stone plaques showed figures with musical instruments, which served to align Lipchitz with cubist painters such as Picasso and Braque, who also took a liking to musical subject matter. Cubist artwork would not be collected by traditional art museums until the early fifties. Barnes was not only aware of the leftist message his sculpture sent, he was excited by it. In 1923 he wrote merrily to Paul Guillaume that “When the public see those Lipschitz carvings on the outside of the building they will say I am not only a radical but a Bolshevist.” Thus cubism was a way in which Barnes’ distance from traditional museums made its way onto the Facade.

Barnes studiously avoided associating his Foundation with other museums. He came to criticize museums in general as “a pedestal upon which a clique of

---

211 Albert C. Barnes to Paul Guillaume, January 15, 1923. ABC, Barnes.
socialites pose as patrons of the arts.”

He did not want his institution to be compared, for example, to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which he called a “house of intellectual prostitution.” From its inception, the Barnes Foundation was chartered as an “educational institution.” The interior as well is a far cry from the dramatic entrances of the nineteenth-century municipal museums. At the Barnes Foundation, the entrance places us right in the main room, where the scale is not one of a grandiose public monument but rather of a large entrance to a home. The staircase is tucked away to the side, invisible from sight upon entrance. And hallways are foregone in favor of a room structure with no easy progression. There is no programmatic layout for this structure, in contrast to Cret’s Detroit commission, where each room was meant to be organized by time period and geographic provenance. Cret would eventually come to resent this dominant programmatic layout for museums, writing to his wife that too often, museums “make the history of art in the manner of history itself,” which favored “the deeds and gestures of the great” over the “life of poor heroes like you and me.”

Adapting his Beaux-Arts vocabulary, Cret actively embraced a new vision for the modernist museum.

In addition to disrupting a sequence of spaces that represented a specific narrative, the floor plan also made the setting in which we viewed the artwork incredibly intimate. Cret wrote that he consciously chose to foreground the domestic quality of the architecture in his writing about the building in 1926. Cret wrote that

---

213 Albert Barnes to John McIlhenny, May 18, 1937.
214 Albert Barnes, “The Barnes Foundation.”
“practically all museums of importance” were buildings that “were built for residence purposes and not their present use.” Cret thus created “a building of limited size… comprising rooms of a sort of intimacy.” This was explicitly so as to “escape from that character” classification alongside other art galleries that might be called, as Cret put it, “cemeteries for works of art.” The intimacy of the rooms, then, served to eliminate the much-critiqued museum from the character of the building.

That the Barnes Foundation looks like a house as much as a public art museum derived also from its setting in suburban Merion (fig. 48). It is situated in a residential neighborhood, distant from other cultural institutions. While this was certainly not the case of most municipal art museums, it also was an aspect of the Barnes Foundation that existed in tension with its mission to forge citizenship amongst its viewers. Ultimately, its closed-off setting would be the impetus for its move to downtown Philadelphia in 2012.

But the Barnes Foundation did not just look like a residence. The floorplan reveals that Barnes’ residence was actually appended to the galleries (fig. 21). The building, then, occupies a position between monumental public building and a private, domestic space. The importance of the domestic in an exhibition space has not yet been adequately discussed. Modernist collectors around the world displayed their collections in intimate settings, removing art from the heavily critiqued environment of the public museum. In Essen, Osthaus too connected his residence to the galleries. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s “studio club” became the Whitney

---

217 Kuenzli has pointed out that not only did Osthaus live in an apartment building inside the museum building, but he also published a poem, “Zarathustra” inspired from Nietzsche’s philosophy of breaking down the boundaries between art and life. Kuenzli, 512.
Museum of American Art for displaying American modernist artwork, as well as Whitney’s own private residence in 1931 when architect Noel L. Miller converted three row houses on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. Other private modernist collections were also noteworthy for their intimacy, often being displayed within the interior of a house. Gertrude and Leo Stein, for instance, maintained a collection of modernist artwork that was displayed inside their home in Paris and was made open to the public (fig. 49). Sergei Shchukin, a prolific Russian modernist collector, also displayed his vast collection of impressionist and post-impressionist works in his home, but made it available to the public on Sundays (fig. 50). The tendency to connect the display of private collections to one’s residence, in the instance of the Steins and Shchukin, might stem from a desire to keep one’s belongings to oneself, no matter how much access they were willing to grant to the public. But in all of these examples, the connection of an individual’s residence with an art gallery fits well with the modernist vision of art and life as being intimately enmeshed. As I discussed in Chapter One, boundaries between painting and architecture had been criticized by members of the Bloomsbury group. Dewey, too, borrowed from this attempt to dissolve the barriers between “art and life.” For Barnes, as for all of these private modernist collectors, one’s dwelling was perhaps a more appropriate arena for artwork than a museum, because it foregrounded the individual viewer as the primary locus of meaning.

The Barnes Foundation was not the simple product of progressive-era civilizing institutions. The building was, in addition to being a Beaux-Arts progressive structure, a domestic modernist museum that foregrounded the formalist, European ideas of the collector. It was moreover part of an attempt to link art viewership with the citizen formation crafted by Dewey and Barnes. Within the walls of this Cret-designed building, citizens would judge artwork and learn to take control over their position in society.
Epilogue

In May of 2012, the Barnes Foundation moved from Cret’s Beaux-Arts limestone mansion in Merion to a new, raw-stone and glass postmodern building on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway (fig. 51). In the face of financial collapse, the Foundation had few resources to keep it alive in its original location. Following court order, the galleries were replicated exactly in their new home, from the dimensions of the gallery, to the wall hangings, to the burlap color on the walls. Matisse’s mural, *The Dance*, was cut from its original location and brought to be displayed under a new ceiling built around its exact measurement. Despite the careful attention to replication, the new Barnes Foundation has about five times the amount of space outside of Cret’s original floor plan, to make room for a cafe, an auditorium, a gift shop, and a temporary exhibition space.

The move raises a number of questions for further analysis. Critics of the move argue that it takes the Foundation further away from its mission. Does the new building change the meaning of the art inside? The site-specificity of the mural *The Dance*, for instance, was something that Matisse carefully considered, and was closely tied to its origins in the modernist concept of the decorative. Of the mural, Matisse wrote “I only know one thing, the place it must be part of, and the spirit of the milieu in which it should sing.”\(^{221}\) The architecture left behind at Merion helped

to characterize the building as both a modernist museum and an institution that was firmly invested in citizenship. Whereas Barnes worked so hard to distance himself from traditional museums through the private setting of the arboretum at Merion, this new structure is, like the Rodin Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Its new additional spaces, the cafe, the auditorium, the gift shop, and its open accessibility to tourists make it a much more traditional museum.

This move also raises questions about the broader public Barnes aimed to reach. He let very few visitors into his galleries who were not students, a fact that remained in tension with his desire to change the way the American public looked at art. Now, in a walkable, urban location that creates a sight line between the city government and cultural institutions, it might perhaps be closer to his vision of democratic access. But then, tourists who can afford to pay the entrance fee do not an inclusive public make.

Still, great effort has been expended to replicate exactly the wall ensembles and the interior floor plan that make the Barnes Foundation so unique. Visiting the galleries on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, one has the distinct feeling of looking into another era. Indeed, the ensembles are frozen just as Barnes left them at his death in 1951. The Barnes Foundation occupies the peculiar position of being, for part of its lifetime, a dynamic, changing collection responding to intellectual forces, and for the other part, a fixed moment in time, paralyzed by the bylaws of its trust indenture. It thus offers a representative quandary, rich for continued study. If the changes to his ensembles reflect his response to intellectual currents, does the 1951 Barnes
Foundation still represent a modernist museum? Jeremy Braddock’s analysis would suggest it does not. His psychoanalytic readings of the ensembles refer to them as they stand today, and incorporate literature the Barnes encountered later. A changing attitude towards race and the end of progressive-era anxiety over citizenship and democracy surely brought new interpretations to the collection. And what of a method of art viewership that encouraged so strongly new and unfamiliar forms? What was once called a “Shrine to all the Craziest ‘Art’”, a new, leftist home for “Art of ‘Radicals,’” is now a gallery filled with art that one might expect to find in the same traditional museums Barnes so adamantly despised.

All of this is to say that with changing intellectual and political climates come different interpretations of the Barnes Foundation, both in Merion and on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. It remains to be seen how this new home embraces or strays from the vision of a modernist organization deeply committed to educated citizenship through art.

---

222 “America’s $6,000,000 Shrine for all the Craziest Art” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 Nov 1923. Archives of the Barnes Foundation.
Appendix

Figure 1. House and Garden Magazine, “The Barnes Foundation”, December 1942
Rooms that glow with color

Subtle interplay of form and color holds many suggestions directly applicable to your home.

Dramatic in its impact, the wall above is actually quite simple in its larger components. Note, however, that the warm yellow tones of the cabinet are picked up in the painting above it, while the blue, red and green of the rare old glass, lighted from the back, form subsidiary contrasts. There is a sense of unity, an avoidance of confusion in the composition.

The solid central mass on this wall begins with the exceptionally fine Pennsylvanian chest and builds up through the larger painting to terminate in the piece of ironwork used imaginatively for its aesthetic value. Just as the architectural character of the chest is in harmony with the simple strength of the picture above it, so do the more fluid lines of the chairs blend with the pictures beneath which they are placed.

A sense of appropriateness is as important in assembling the pieces for a room in your home as in composing a gallery wall. The famous Manet which forms the center of this ensemble has a simple, rustic charm which is echoed in the graceful but plain Early American chair, bench and candlesticks. More sophisticated, elaborate pieces would have been entirely out of key with the spirit of this grouping.
Figure 3. Folkwang Museum, Hagen

Figure 4. Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pa. Designed by Paul Cret in 1922.
Figure 5. Second Post-Impressionism Exhibition: Grafton Galleries, 1912.
Figure 6. Cézanne, *The Card Players*, 1880-1890
Figure 7. Early sketch of the ensembles. Albert Barnes to Paul Guillaume, 31 Jan 1927.
Figure 8. Ensemble with *The Bather* from 1927.

Figure 9. Paul Cézanne, *Village Square*, c. 1881
Figure 10. Paul Cézanne, *Bottle and Fruit*, 1890

![Bottle and Fruit](image1)

Figure 11. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Woman with Black Hair*, 1911

![Woman with Black Hair](image2)
Figure 12. Vincent van Gogh, *Thatched Cottages in the Sunshine: Reminiscence of the North*, 1890

Figure 13. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Oranges and Bananas*, 1913
Figure 14. Pierre Auguste Renoir, Landscape, 1917

Figure 15. Ensemble from 1928
Figure 16. Ensemble from 1928 showing medieval painting.
Figure 17. Ensemble from 1928 showing African sculpture.
Figure 18. Mezzanine walkway overlooking the main gallery
Figure 19. Matisse, The Dance 1934

Figure 20. Matisse, *The Dance* close-up
Figure 21. Floorplan of the Barnes Foundation.
Figure 22. African tile portico at the entrance of the Barnes Foundation
Figure 23. Baule door motif, African tile portico
Figure 24. Seated Senufo figures, African tile portico
Figure 25. African figural sculpture representations on the frieze of the African tile portico
Figure 26. Close-up, African tile portico
Figure 27. Mask Replica, African tile portico
Figure 28. Lipschitz bas-reliefs at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pa. Completed in 1922.
Figure 29. Folkwang Museum, Hagen
Figure 30. Folkwang Museum, Hagen
Figure 31. Mosaic by Henry van de Velde at the Entrance of the Folkwang

Figure 32. Barnes comparing Renoirs in the Collection. 1928
Figure 33. Floor plan, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Figure 35. Ivory Coast Mask from *Primitive Negro Sculpture*
Figure 36. *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. Aaron Douglas, 1925
Figure 37. Head of a Man with Cityscape, Aaron Douglas. 1925
Figure 38. The Young Black Hungers: 1928 Cover of *The Crisis*, Aaron Douglas, 1928
Figure 39. Windows at the Barnes Foundation, Merion

Figure 40. Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld
Figure 41. Folkwang Museum, Hagen

Figure 42. Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Figure 43. Musee Rodin, Meudon
Figure 44. Rodin Museum, Philadelphia
Figure 45. Interior of the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia
Figure 46. Baule Door from the Barnes Foundation Collection
Figure 47. Seated Senufo figure from *Primitive Negro Sculpture* from the Barnes Foundation Collection.
Figure 48. Aerial view of the Barnes Foundation at Merion, Pennsylvania
Figure 49. Gertrude and Leo Stein’s home at 27 rue de Fleurus, Paris
Figure 50. Shchukin collection, Moscow
Figure 51. The Barnes Foundation on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in downtown Philadelphia
Bibliography

Archival Sources

Barnes Foundation Archives, Merion, Pennsylvania; Albert C. Barnes Correspondence and miscellaneous files.

Published Sources

Periodical Literature

The Dial
Harper's Monthly Magazine
The New Republic
The New York Times
Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life
The Philadelphia Inquirer
The Washington Post
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Books and Essays


The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (New York) *Eighth and Ninth Reports,* January 1, 1878,


Prichard, Matthew Stewart, “Current Theories of the Arrangement of Museums of Art and Their Application to the Museum of Fine Arts” in *Communications to the Trustees, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, (Mar 1904)


