DIRECTOR’S NOTE

This Bulletin, the first of 2005, marks the beginning of the centennial year of the magazine. It has come a long way. According to its founding statement, published in November 1905, the Bulletin’s scope was “a humble one… not intended to be a rival to any existing art publication” or to “consciously trespass on the sphere of any art critic.” It aimed simply to be a “ready means of communication” between the Metropolitan and its members. The statement noted that “many of our citizens, who are familiar with the great museums abroad, are quite ignorant of their Museum at home… it will not be the fault of the Bulletin if that condition continues.”

To be published quarterly, under the direction of the Museum secretary, the Bulletin would list new acquisitions, with illustrations “whenever practicable,” and serve as a “full information bureau,” including notices of gallery rearrangements and changes in rules. “It will be sent to all members… without extra charge. It will not be voluminous.” Striking a contemporary chord, the statement commented that “our members are most of them busy people, already overwhelmed with overmuch printed material. . . . The Bulletin will contain just the number of pages b e they more or less, which are necessary to give the information required, and there it will end, even if the last page be not filled out.”

By January 1906 the Bulletin had “found so hearty an appreciation” that the Museum decided to publish it bimonthly, with a yearly subscription price of fifty cents and single copies offered for ten cents. Only a month later the Trustees announced that it would be issued monthly, as there was so much to communicate—this being a period of a prodigious increase in our holdings—that a quarterly would “approach magazine bulk.” Nonetheless, in 1942 a new monthly series, in a magazine format, was inaugurated in which pages almost wholly devoted to listing and describing recent acquisitions gave way to more general, short, informative articles featuring Museum objects. In 1972 the Bulletin changed again to a quarterly devoted to a single topic inspired by works in the collections. Larger and liberally illustrated in color, it would still be sent free to members, but could also be sold at the Museum to generate additional revenue. The new look proved a success. A growing membership and abundant subscriptions have pushed the circulation beyond 110,000. It has become a well-respected art magazine in its own right, while not trespassing, as far as I know, on “the sphere of any art critic.”

Through the years many staff members have guided the course of the Bulletin. I wish to mention here the important contribution made by Bradford D. Kelleher, a mainstay of Museum retail operations and publishing since 1949 and now a valued consultant. Today the high standards and fine quality of this publication are maintained by John P. O’Neill and our Editorial Department, particularly the Bulletin’s editor in chief, Joan Holt, who works closely with Chief Production Manager Peter Antony. Ultimately, however, the success of the Bulletin is due to the enthusiastic support of our members, without whom we simply could not publish it.

This issue is devoted to Baroque painting, which has been represented in the Museum since 1903 but, as Jayne Wrightsman Curator Keith Christiansen points out, has been acquired only randomly until fairly recently. The collection still lacks many outstanding names, such as Orazio Gentileschi and Pietro da Cortona, but boasts works by Caravaggio, Guercino, Guido Reni, and Ribera. Fortunately, it is a field in which purchases can still be made. We hope, with luck and support from collectors, someday to bring it up to the level of our great holdings of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish works. In his illuminating and lively commentary, Christiansen provides keys to understanding Baroque paintings, explains the impact of changing taste on their fortunes, and explores their rich heritage and dramatic subjects.

Philippe de Montebello
Director