The Gifts That Made the Museum

By A. Hyatt Mayor

Curator of Prints

The Museum's current exhibition of Collectors' Choice fills a large area of the building, but the thirteen galleries are still able to show only selections from about as many collections. This summarizes our story as newspaper headlines summarize the news. The space in our Bulletin can tell only slightly more about the long, intricate, and generous co-operation that has created the Metropolitan Museum, for all our hundreds of thousands of works of art have without exception either been given by public-spirited men and women or else acquired out of their gifts of money. This is the case with almost every museum in the United States, unlike most major museums abroad, which add to their collections substantially through tax money. Our vast organism has been built up particle by particle, like a coral atoll, through the efforts of countless contributors of every kind and condition, of every walk of life and diversity of view, because private collecting requires interest rather than wealth. There are naturally many kinds of things that cost a great deal, but fascinating collections have been made out of what might have been spent on beer and cigarettes.

We Americans have collected a little differently from other people. We were denied the historic opportunities afforded to proconsuls and viceroys, nor have we had wealthy adolescents who traveled for their education with wise tutors to guide their purchases. Our interests as collectors grew out of our interests as manufacturers and merchants, as promoters and organizers, and followed them into every corner of the world and every epoch and activity of man. The creation of our industries and our network of services exercised our imagination, but collecting gave us romance. Our art collections, like our industrial organization, are our heritage from the heroic age of American private enterprise.

Costly things crammed the huge houses that Americans used to build, but when one by one the houses fell victim to inheritance taxes or financial fluctuations, the collections could only be preserved intact by giving them to the public. Such gifts have linked the donors forever with famous works of art and so have helped to make their names familiar to every educated American and to every art expert abroad. The collectors who have been forced to sell have suffered doubly, for they have not only lost their possessions, but also the perpetuation of their memory.

It is hard to imagine this complex Museum at its start, with no building, no works of art, nothing but the intangible motor of energy and hope. The first work of art that the Museum acquired was the big, four-square Roman stone sarcophagus with a lid like a Noah's ark, which was given in 1870 by the United States Vice-Consul in Tarsus, Abdo Debbas. Mr. Debbas had never heard of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, organized only a few months before, but he sent his stone ark across the waters teeming with an idea from the Old World to start life in the New World wherever an American institution could foster it. This gift from an eastern outpost of the Roman Empire brought a classical idea to a western outpost of Europe. Coming from the launching place of our religions, our literature, and our art, this first gift from the Mediterranean was followed by many others from the same region. In 1881 our second President, Henry G. Marquand, made the first of his many gifts, several hundred pieces of early Syrian and Roman glass, and in 1889 Lucy W. Drexel gave over 2,000 objects from Egypt, Greece, and the Near East. A bequest of the highest quality came in 1891 from Edward C. Moore, the president of Tiffany and Company, who left a collection illustrating the decorative arts of many countries and many periods, which includes extraordinary Syrian enameled glass and Mohammedan metalwork. This bequest, with later additions from Mr. and Mrs. George Dupont Pratt, Horace Havemeyer, and other generous donors has helped to compose a remarkably comprehensive
showing of Islamic metalwork, pottery, glass, carpets, textiles, and miniatures.

In reading over the early records of the Museum one is struck by the amount of help given by women. In 1889 when Mrs. Drexel made her Near Eastern gift, she also started a large donation of musical instruments by giving 43 of them. A few months after this start, Mrs. John Crosby Brown picked up this beginning and gave 270 more. In the course of the years Mrs. Brown and her son, William Adams Brown, added nearly 3,000 musical instruments, which they selected systematically to represent all kinds of music-making all over the world. The glory of the Museum’s collection lies in its unique coverage, as well as in its important historical pieces, such as the Cristofori pianoforte, made in Florence in 1720.

After 1888, when John Jacob Astor gave Mrs. Astor’s laces, it seemed as though every lady in New York had followed suit until these competitive gifts have made the most comprehensive assemblage of types of lace to be found in any one place. The lace collection is remarkable in that very few important pieces have been bought. Women have also provided much of the collections of textiles and costumes. In 1890 the Misses Sarah and Josephine Lazarus made the first of many gifts of fans, snuff boxes, and jewelry, and in 1930 Mrs. Edward S. Harkness gave the extraordinary Jubinal collection of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century costume accessories. Without this remarkable documentation of dress the Museum could not have attracted the Costume Institute to join us.

The first woman to make a very great contribution to the Museum was Catharine Lorillard Wolfe, the only woman among the original subscribers in 1870, who, in 1887, bequeathed 143 contemporary paintings with an endowment to care for and add to her collection. This was our first self-supporting gift, and it has enabled the Wolfe collection to keep up with changes of taste by adding such paintings as Renoir’s Madame Charpentier and Her Children, Goya’s Bullfight, Delacroix’s Abduction of Rebecca, Cézanne’s Poorhouse on the Hill, and Daumier’s Don Quixote. The Wolfe bequest rounded out the bold and highly intelligent purchase by subscription, in 1871, of 174 old paintings, many of which still hold their place on our walls. The tradition of women’s generosity was continued in 1948, when Catherine D. Wentworth bequeathed one of the most representative collections of early French silver, together with an endowment whose income can be used for the ever pressing needs of operation. Mrs. Wentworth’s fund has also served to buy fine paintings, such as Chardin’s Boy Blowing Bubbles.

Our present possibilities bear no relation to those of the Museum before 1900. Most purchases then necessitated personal appeals to Trustees, which could not be repeated too often, even with the devoted founders. So small were the sums that could be scraped together for buying works of art, with no prospect of their ever growing greater, that the early Museum felt it best to lay in casts, electrotypes, and facsimiles of the kinds of objects that seemed forever impossible to acquire. Then, in 1901, everything changed when Jacob S. Rogers died, leaving four and a half million dollars whose income was to be used for buying “rare and desirable works of art” and books for the Museum library. Since 1883 Mr. Rogers had paid an annual membership of ten dollars, usually in person, and had once asked for a copy of the constitution and by-laws. He must have thought that the Museum was capable of using large means wisely. The reputation of doing satisfactory work has always helped institutions more than any advertising. Mr. Rogers’ example led to other great donations of funds, notably those received from John S. Kennedy in 1910, from Joseph Pulitzer in 1913, from Mrs. Russell Sage and Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher in 1917, from Frank Munsey in 1927, from Harriette M. Arnold and Elisha Whittelsey in 1943, and from other donors mentioned elsewhere. The older funds have yielded many times their principal for purchasing works of art. If an exhibition were to be made of purchases from these funds it would include much that is world-famous and would cover every aspect of the collections, because a donor of money becomes a universal donor.

Mr. Rogers, who owned no works of art, realized that a great public art collection must have a good library for public study and above all for informing curators so that they can administer
Young Woman with a Water Jug, by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889
large purchasing funds. His intention was ably seconded by Samuel P. Avery, who continually gave rare early books on the history of art.

The Rogers bequest changed the whole nature of the Museum. It could no longer be managed by a group of art-lovers who gave their time, their money, and their possessions, or persuaded their friends to do likewise. Overnight the Museum found itself a powerful buyer of art, and it had to know what it was buying. But to pay for a competent staff seemed beyond the means of the Museum until 1908, when Frederick C. Hewitt made us his residuary legatee, allowing the income to be used for operating expenses. Because the Hewitt Fund is not restricted some very fine additions to the collections have been bought out of it, including the two life-sized Chinese pottery Lohans and the stele of Megakles, a most impressive archaic Greek grave relief.

The first section of the Museum to put itself on a new professional basis was probably the Egyptian department. As early as 1896 various donors contributed to the Egypt Exploration Fund to secure antiquities by excavation, and the Rogers Fund then enabled the Museum to dig in Egypt on its own from 1906 to 1936. In addition Edward S. Harkness provided funds for the purchase of an immense number of treasures, ranging from the Tomb of Per-neb—that inscrutable portal to our share of Egypt—to the blue faience hippo, who, as William, has endeared himself as a universal household pet. In 1927 Mr. Harkness gave money to buy the Earl of Carnarvon’s collection of some 1,400 of the most exquisite Egyptian objects ever assembled by any one man. In 1930, when the estate of Theodore M. Davis was settled, the Museum fell heir to paintings and decorative works, and a unique collection of Egyptian antiquities, many of which he had excavated in the Valley of the Kings. We lack the massive accumulation of the Cairo Museum and the monumental stones of the British Museum, but, thanks to donors who seized opportunities that will never return, we present the story of three thousand years in the Nile Valley with dramatic clarity.

The other great archaeological series, those of Greece and Rome, could not be scooped up in Italy or Greece by the dragnet of excavations but have had to be purchased bit by bit with care and patience. The collection started when many subscribers purchased the huge Cesnola collection of Cypriot antiquities in 1872-1876. Since then almost every great general gift has included something Greek or Roman. The department has received a few very important gifts, such as the Roman life-sized bronze of a patrician boy given with other bronzes in 1897 by Mr. Marquand, whose gift of Roman glass has already been mentioned. In 1932 John D. Rockefeller, Jr., presented the famous marble of a wounded Amazon from Lansdowne House, only one of many masterpieces that various departments have received from him. The Hermes from the same house has recently been given by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

The Far Eastern collection was also started by generous subscribers in 1879 when they purchased some 1,300 Chinese ceramics perceptively selected by that astute connoisseur Samuel P. Avery. Most of the early gifts were Japanese, such as the more than 500 pieces of pottery and porcelain given in 1893 by Charles Stewart Smith to which his Japanese paintings were added in his memory in 1914. In 1902 came the gift from Heber R. Bishop of over 1,000 Chinese jades carved in the most intricate techniques. In 1911 Samuel T. Peters gave the first of a series of massive and majestic early jades, pottery, and porcelains, and after his death in 1929 Mrs. Peters made a further donation. William Rhinelander Stewart rounded out the porcelains with the courtly art, unjustly neglected today, of blue and white, and William Christian Paul bequeathed over 1,000 Chinese textiles, which made our collection the richest outside the former Imperial Palace Museum in Peking. Howard Mansfield, one of America’s pioneer collectors of Japanese art, gave pottery and other decorative objects in 1936. In 1940 Henry L. Phillips bequeathed a collection of Japanese prints that are remarkable for their freshness and quality. Two years afterwards Mrs. John D. Rockefeller presented over thirty-five sculptures and some paintings, which captivated her, as they do everyone, by a stillness that lives only in man’s deepest meditation. In 1949 Mrs. Otto H. Kahn and her four children gave a magnificent series.
Portrait of Don Tiburcio Pérez, by Francisco de Goya (1746-1828), dated 1820. Pérez was an architect and a personal friend of the artist. The Theodore M. Davis collection. Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915
LEFT: Fauchard with the arms of Camillo, Cardinal Borghese, ensigned with the papal keys and tiara. The cardinal was elected pope in 1605. Italian, XVI century. RIGHT: Above, burgonet made for the French court. Italian, about 1550. Below, double-barreled wheellock pistol of the Emperor Charles V, etched with the Hapsburg eagle and the emperor’s device. Made by Peter Pech of Munich, about 1540. Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913.
LEFT: Tilting armor of Philip II of Spain, etched with bands of a conventional pomegranate design. German, about 1560. RIGHT: Above, breastplate etched with figures of the Christ Child, Saint Christopher, and Saint Sebastian. Italian, about 1500. Below, a pair of tassets belonging to a harness of the Emperor Charles V. They are embossed, etched, and gilded, each bearing the device of the Column of Hercules along with a rampant griffin. Attributed to Matthäus Frauenpreis the Elder, German (Augsburg), about 1545. Bequest of Bashford Dean, 1928
of Shang and Chou bronze sacrificial vessels that combine sophistication and violence to a degree unattained by other works of art.

The Department of Arms and Armor has attracted more specialists than most. Our collection received early encouragement from Rutherford Stuyvesant, and the finest pieces from his armory were presented by his son Alan. In 1913 it began to assume importance when William Henry Riggs presented nearly 2,000 pieces—one of the greatest collections ever assembled by a private citizen. In 1926 Jean Jacques Reubell gave swords made for display in court and for hunting and a unique series of fine daggers. Ten years later George Cameron Stone bequeathed over 3,000 examples of oriental arms and armor, which he had collected during some fifty years. Whenever gaps in the developmental series could be filled Bashford Dean filled them with his gifts during his energetic curatorship and then bequeathed a substantial sum to allow the Museum to acquire objects from his collection. As a result, the Museum’s armor collection, while not as complete in historical examples as the armories of Madrid and Vienna, nevertheless covers vastly more of the world and includes a greater variety of types. It is in fact the only single collection from which one might illustrate the whole history of the subject.

Various small lots of prints came during the early years, but there was no special department until 1916, when Harris Brisbane Dick bequeathed a large estate. Since Mr. Dick was a prominent print collector, this seemed like a good opportunity to found a print department by acquiring his collection. The income from the Dick Fund enabled the new department to make many of its basic purchases. In 1920 George Coe Graves gave some superb Rembrandt and Van Dyck etchings, along with much furniture, glass, and pewter for the American Wing. The same combination of prints and American domestic furnishings came through the bequest of Charles Allen Munn in 1924, whose distinguished early American engravings now decorate the American Wing along with his silver and his paintings. In 1919 Junius Spencer Morgan gave his fine Dürer woodcuts when the Museum bought his Dürer engravings. In 1931 James Clark McGuire bequeathed a series of Gothic woodcuts of extraordinary importance. The greatest gift of prints arrived in 1941, when Felix M. Warburg and his family gave unforgettable Rembrandts and a series of early woodcuts and engravings the like of which will never be available again. The Museum’s print collection, as it stands today, cannot compare in size with the collections in London, Paris, and Vienna and might be smaller than those in Washington and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, but it includes fine examples of practically every kind of printed picture.

In 1909 the Museum held an imaginative exhibition to commemorate the three-hundredth anniversary of Henry Hudson’s voyage and the hundredth of Robert Fulton’s steamship popularly known as the Clermont. To celebrate this double anniversary the Museum borrowed Dutch works of art of Hudson’s time and all kinds of Americana down to Fulton’s era. The photographs of the exhibition show an installation that was in advance of its time in its attempt to suggest period backgrounds by placing furniture in front of a width of paneling. Primitive as it may look today, this was the first big showing of early Americana, and the revelation permanently changed American collecting, for our homespun handicrafts were the last thing that we had ever thought of as works of art. A year later Mrs. Russell Sage gave over 700 pieces of early American furniture that had been acquired by Eugene Bolles. The Hudson-Fulton show started Judge Alphonso T. Clearwater hunting for the rich series of American silver which he bequeathed to the Museum in 1933. It also interested Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. de Forest, who began to give a great variety of Americana. When the old Assay Office in Wall Street was about to be torn down they salvaged its classical marble façade and financed most of the intricate fitting together of the paneled rooms behind it to create the American Wing. There is something genial, original, and homey in the taste of Mr. and Mrs. de Forest, whether they collected Pennsylvania German fractur and painted chests or Mexican pottery. The American Wing has struck the public imagination more than any single feature of the Museum, so that many gifts have
ABOVE: Left, Reverie, by Jean Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875). Right, Dancers Practicing at the Bar, by Edgar Hilaire Germain Degas (1834-1917).

BELOW: Left, By the Seashore, by Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919). Right, Majas on a Balcony, by Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). This painting is the second of three renderings of the subject by Goya. The H. O. Havemeyer collection. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929.
ABOVE: One of two Japanese screens depicting the four seasons, Sotatsu-Korin school, early XVII century.

come to it. The most splendid was probably the magnificent furnishings and pictures given by Mrs. Insley Blair and her daughters.

After the Rogers bequest of 1901 transformed the Museum’s pattern of collecting, this change in turn affected the pattern of private collecting. When a professional staff grew up to cope with the new responsibilities of purchasing, the more knowledgeable organization became better able to care for great gifts and bequests. So with more purchases came also more donations, on the principle that to him who hath shall be given. Unjust as this principle is for individuals, it is usually wise in institutions, for they who have much have almost always learned how to preserve and display their riches. When the Museum’s collections began to suggest the founders’ goal of showing the history of man by the most notable things that he has made, our ideal of universality became a model for some private collectors as well. The Benjamin Altman bequest in 1914 included objects of many kinds, many ages, and many materials. Mr. Altman directed that his collection be shown as a unit. Nowadays, when it seems unusual to hang a Gerard Dou beside the meditative beauty of a Rembrandt, making a harmonious blend of Mr. Altman’s oriental rugs, his renaissance sculpture, his brilliant Chinese porcelains, and his paintings by Dürer, Rembrandt, Titian, Verrocchio, Velázquez, Vermeer, and others may tax a curator’s ingenuity. However, these superlative objects have been kept together as Mr. Altman directed.

Then, in 1917, there arrived the greatest of all these general gifts, J. P. Morgan’s collection, which came through the gift of his son. The elder Mr. Morgan had been giving and lending to the Museum for twenty years or so, but the son’s donation of over 5,500 objects from his father’s collection seemed to double the importance of the entire establishment. Who can describe such an astonishing collection, which shines in almost every room of the whole vast building? For Mr. Morgan did not usually collect objects like other people. He collected collections. This meant that he gathered up the results of incalculable many-years of searching and experience. What a pity that he knew his treasures only piece-meal as they were scattered in his houses in England, in storage in Paris, on loan in many a museum here and abroad, for he died in 1913 without experiencing the cumulative effect of sequences and harmonious groupings. Many people called the collection princely, and the trite adjective will do as well as any, for these objects of silver and gold and jewels—or else of a workmanship more precious than any material—are prizes that popes and emperors wrangled to possess.

In the years since the younger Mr. Morgan’s gift many general collections have contributed superbly to all parts of the Museum. In 1917 Isaac D. Fletcher left the Museum paintings, drawings, and examples of decorative arts. The bequest included our second largest purchase fund—almost as large, indeed, as the Rogers Fund itself—which has served to buy many masterpieces for every part of the collections. Ogden Mills gave very fine renaissance bronzes. Michael Dreicer in 1921 left a collection that was outstanding for its small paintings and its medieval enamels. Throughout the 1920’s Mr. and Mrs. V. Everit Macy gave some of the most beautiful of our Egyptian and Islamic art. George Blumenthal’s bequest and the gift of his widow added sumptuous masterpieces of furniture, enamels, lace, ivories, carved rock crystal, bronzes, paintings by Joos van Gent, Agnolo Gaddi, and El Greco, and a whole marble courtyard that is one of the oldest renaissance monuments from Spain. Donations in the field of the decorative arts have very recently been made on the same grand scale by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation and in furniture by Judge Irwin Untermyer.

It is odd that these general collections added few European porcelains and few of the porcelains that the Chinese made for export. This lack was magnificently made up by the gift from the Winfield Foundation of the Helena Woolworth McCann collection of China-trade porcelain and by the gifts which R. Thornton Wilson has carefully selected to create a balanced and continuous series of European ceramic masterpieces.

Our gifts, comprehensive though they were, also did not enable us to show the architecture of the Middle Ages, which is not only the most complete achievement of that age, but one of the most daring of all the flights of man’s spirit. Architecture can obviously not be shown in our
LEFT: Francesco d'Este, by Rogier van der Weyden (about 1400-1464), perhaps painted in Brussels, where Francesco was educated. RIGHT: Portrait of a Lady of the Sassetti Family, by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). The Michael Friedsam collection. Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931
building on Fifth Avenue, extensive though it is. For some twenty years John D. Rockefeller, Jr., worked to realize this dream, and when finally in May 1938, the branch museum of The Cloisters was opened it revealed a world of logical equipoise and inmost harmony previously unavailable to Americans at home. The profound appeal of The Cloisters draws more people to it on summer Sundays than to the Main Building in the middle of town.

There is one very varied collection which made so special a contribution to the Museum that it deserves a particular description. This is the H. O. Havemeyer collection, bequeathed by Mrs. Havemeyer in 1929 and added to by her children. Mr. and Mrs. Havemeyer had been giving to the Museum since 1896, while they were forming their celebrated collection with impeccable individuality and taste. They did not care whether they collected the fashionable arts of Japan and China or flouted the taste of their time by going hot-headed for El Greco and the Impressionists. They had in the highest degree the indispensable requirement for a great collector—the courage of perception—and this rare quality makes a Havemeyer object recognizable no matter where it turns up. Their things do not look rich materially but each one identifies itself in any gallery by its accent of imagination. The collection glows in the Near East with examples of the finest types of Mesopotamian and Persian pottery, in the Far East with Korean celadon, Chinese pottery, Chinese and Japanese paintings, and among the prints with America's most velvety impression of Rembrandt's Hundred Guilder etching and other Rembrandts no less good. But the great glory of the Havemeyer collection lies in its European paintings. Their Manets and Degas and Courbets are so fine that these painters can now be seen better in America than at home. The collection has become a part of all our lives, and New York would no longer be quite itself if one now took away the series of Degas paintings and bronzes, Goya's Majas on a Balcony, or El Greco's storm over Toledo.

The paintings galleries have benefited from almost all of these general collections, but they have also received some particular gifts. The first gift to what is now the Paintings Department was a collection of almost 700 Italian seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drawings received from Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1880. It is still the largest group of drawings that the Museum has ever acquired. As the art of the baroque is studied more thoroughly these Vanderbilt drawings are gradually being identified and take their rightful place. In 1881 young Thomas Eakins gave his exact and somber painting of the Chess Players, the first of our gifts from distinguished artists.

In 1889 Henry G. Marquand presented 39 paintings which he had collected quite on his own before the days of handy books of reference and easily available photographs. These modern aids to study might not have helped him much, for Mr. Marquand was a busy banker and the Museum's second president to boot, so he can have had little leisure for research; yet he had so perceptive an instinct that he managed to make the first American collection of really great paintings. His memory lives in the attraction that draws people every hour to his Van Dyck of the Duke of Richmond and Lennox for the poetry of its negligence, to his Rembrandt portrait of a Man with a Beard for the deep black thought in the eye and the breathing emergence of the head, to Vermeer's girl with a silver pitcher for its premeditated poise and its sky-like clarity.

In the same year of 1889 Erwin Davis gave the first Impressionist paintings to enter any American museum, Manet's Woman with a Parrot and Boy with a Sword, which were then unexpected and therefore looked so raw and ugly that few museums would have dared to hang them. Thus, by swinging between the old and the new, the paintings collection kept its breadth of taste and liveliness of interest.

It was a long time before anyone else made a gift that consisted predominantly of paintings, but in 1920, when William K. Vanderbilt bequeathed a black lacquer commode and desk made by Riesener for Marie Antoinette he also left ten paintings by Rembrandt, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Boucher, and others, which might even surpass the furniture. In the same way Colonel Michael Friedsam's collection, which
Madonna in Glory, dotted print. Netherlands school, 1450-1500. Bequest of James Clark McGuire, 1931
Detail of Christ Presented to the People, etching by Rembrandt (1606-1669), first state, 1655. The third and seventh states of this print are also shown in the exhibition. Gift of Felix Warburg and His Family, 1941
ABOVE: The Adoration of the Magi, by Joos van Gent (active 1460-about 1480).

BELOW: Left, the Annunciation, with a background of stars, plaque of champlevé enamel on copper-gilt, French, xi or early xiii century. Center and right, two figures of Holy Women, from a group representing the Entombment of Christ, painted and gilded walnut, Franco-Flemish, second half of the xv century. Gift and Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941.
Chair made by J. B. C. Sené, French, about 1788. Gift and Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941
came in 1932, was remarkable for its Gothic and renaissance decorative works, but even more so for such paintings as Van der Weyden’s portrait of Francesco d’Este with his little hammer and Dürer’s Salvator Mundi. The first outstanding group of paintings to come to us recently was the bequest of Maitland F. Griggs in 1943. Among other beautiful Italian pictures this brought Sassett’s Journey of the Magi, which has enlivened our notion of Christmas with the nonchalance of the monkey lolling on the baggage of frankincense and myrrh. In the year 1949 the Jules S. Bache collection came to the Museum, to be kept together like the Altman collection. It included—among many others—the bronze of David as a stocky and resolute lad by Luca della Robbia, Carlo Crivelli’s little Madonna that has survived five centuries as fresh and delicate as a salad, Goya’s Don Manuel Osorio in red rompers, with his birds and his saucer-eyed cats, and the portrait of a less robust boy, the sickly, subtle profile of little Edward VI—one of Holbein’s alarming psychological masterpieces.

It is, alas, not possible even to mention the many, many people who have given one or another very beautiful painting, but one cannot pass over two great canvases which were received from Harry Payne Bingham in 1937 and 1940—Rubens’ warmly and grandly flowing Venus and Adonis, and Courbet’s wide canvas of the Demoiselles de Village walking their lonely valley under the mystery of noon. Our collection of nineteenth-century French painting was greatly enhanced in 1951, when Samuel A. Lewisohn’s bequest distributed his collection to various American museums, allotting to each exactly what it needed most. He strengthened us where we were weakest by leaving us, among other things, Seurat’s sunny sketch for La Grande Jatte, Van Gogh’s sulphurously bilious Arlésienne, and Gauguin’s Ia Orana Maria, that beautiful vision of an innocence which even Tahiti never enjoyed. In 1951 the Harkness bequest added Constable’s vision of Salisbury Cathedral sparkling after a summer shower, and Lawrence’s celebrated painting of Miss Farren gazing down at us from an elegant height and dangling the slenderest, most provocative glove in all art. Thus this Lawrence joined the painter’s other famous work—the animated Calmady Children—which came in among other fine pictures in the bequest of Collis Potter Huntington, in 1925.

These are all paintings that no one can dispraise, but lest admiration make the Museum complacent, in 1906 and 1911 George A. Hearn and his son Arthur H. Hearn gave funds to buy paintings by living American artists. The Hearn Fund made a more local but more violent revolution than the Rogers Fund, for it hurtled the Museum from the politeness—or at least the reticence—of the dead into the scrimmage of the living. When a seasoned New Yorker grumbles in a proprietary way about “the Met” ten to one he scolds the Opera for missing great sopranos and the Museum for expending the Hearn Fund on too advanced or too conservative art, depending on the critic’s brand of modernity. Yet this explosive attention is a good sign, for it proves that purchases of the Hearn Fund mean something to many people, and that the Hearn money is doing what the donors wanted it to do—stirring up interest in the production of painting in the United States. The half century of buying has brought in pictures that figure in every survey of American painting, such as Ryder’s Toilers of the Sea, Homer’s Harvest Scene, Eakins’ Signora Gomez d’Arza and Pushing for Rail, and Sargent’s Madame X. An indisputable endorsement of the Hearn Fund policy has come in the form of the recent bequest of Hugo Kastor and other substantial gifts that further strengthen our American section.

The Metropolitan Museum is healthy because it has grown the way a city museum should grow—out of the interests and activities of the city itself. Since we are—for better or for worse—the American center of the theater, of fashion, of music, of the art market, of printing, of finance, and of many other occupations, New York is the most complex city in the Americas, and it needs a collection of works of art which will answer its infinite questions and respond to the unpredictable diversity of its longings. The variety of our collections would be superfluous elsewhere, but here they seem just as full as an egg.
ABOVE: The Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin of the Annunciation, by Gerard David (active by about 1484, died 1523). BELOW: Marble bust of the sculptor’s daughter Sabine, by Jean Antoine Houdon (1741–1828), dated 1788. Gold statuette of the god Amun, Egyptian (Thebes), about 900 B.C. Bequest of Mary Stillman Harkness, 1950