

The Character of an Art Collection:

**Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Clay Frick, Albert C. Barnes,
David Lloyd Kreeger, and the Donor Memorial in the U.S.**

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ABSTRACT

Donor memorial museums represent a unique group of American art collections. These museums, created by private art collectors to perpetuate their own legacies, are among the most interesting institutions in the American art world. House museums like the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Frick Collection, and the Kreeger Museum are especially intriguing because each iconoclastic collector conceived and implemented a specific vision for how visitors would view the collection. These museums, along with one of the most controversial private art collections in the country, the Barnes Foundation, share many similarities in format and creation. Each is an anomaly in its respective setting and fully projects the force and personality of its creator. The architectural styles of the buildings especially convey the eccentricities of the donors, who chose ostentatious, incongruous architectural vocabularies for 20th century Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. Strong desires and wishes of the collection creators, coupled with virtually iron-clad legal wills, ensure constancy and permanence for these institutions. Although it no longer seems to be the fashion or convention of the wealthy to devote energies and resources to cultivating such private art collections, these institutions remain popular destinations for art lovers. Their continued existence allows us to understand how people of another age created monuments to themselves—museums that still fascinate and attract us today.

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INTRODUCTION

Art museums are beacons of culture and sophistication that signal prestige to members of all communities, American or international. While some art museums gain sponsorship from national or state government, others depend on different sources for financial and aesthetic direction. Museums based on private art collections, some of which are referred to as donor memorials¹, present a different category of art museum. Art collections with strong ties to their founders often have distinctive characters, while larger institutions can seem sterile and cold. The importance of the donors in these environments cannot be denied—private museums preserve the status of the collector beyond his or her lifetime and act as a key to immortality. Lures like immortality and an enduring spotlight, though, attract only a certain type of person. Those who conceive of a donor memorial museum and have the capacity and drive to bring such a dream to fruition share common traits including eccentricity, aggressiveness, and sociability. Henry Clay Frick, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Albert C. Barnes, and David Lloyd Kreeger epitomize the idea of the private art collector. Just how much did each donor's personality impact the interior and exterior design of his or her museum?

From this question, one may also look at the architecture of the home of a private collection and explore what it conveys about both the founder and collection itself. The contrasts between architecture as chosen by committee, as practiced by public art museums, and the architecture of personal or individual whim, choice, and taste that private collectors employ, provide a basis for examining private art museums versus larger, public institutions. The origin and impetus of the founders' vision, his or her planning, and the resultant architecture for housing the collection—all often strongly shaped by the individual, despite the involvement of

¹ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, London: 1995. 72.

carefully chosen and acclaimed architects—also highlight personality traits in collectors that strongly influence their own individual processes of creating their museums.

The sites of these collections will also play an integral role in the examination of the museums. The process by which collectors arrived at their current location bespeaks the intentions of the museum as a whole and relates directly to the collections' relationship to the public. Museums removed from highly populated areas give the impression of isolation and unfriendliness, while museums in city centers may seem more welcoming and available. With location, collection parameters, and the building style they chose for their museums, private art collectors formulated a grand statement of purpose visible to the greater community. Wealth, power, status, independence, success, culture, refinement, competition, and other factors each played a role in inspiring art collectors to create such monumental museums, and these traits ultimately shined through in the final product of the museums themselves. Art historian William George Constable wrote of art collecting:

It is often said that collectors the world over are inspired by the same motives. Certainly, pure greed and pride in possession; desire for social prestige; rivalry with other collectors; love for and interest in the objects collected; patronage and encouragement of the arts; and a wish to instruct and benefit the public mingled in varying proportions, are important elements in determining why, when and how a collector sets to work.²

Collectors like Gardner, Frick, Barnes, and Kreeger ultimately achieved celebrity and renown by way of their eccentricities. They were all regarded as great art collectors with exceptional tastes—in that way, their goals of societal acknowledgement were achieved. On the other hand, each patron strived to be the epitome of cultural sophistication, but they were often derided for over-the-top antics and for creating caricatures of what they truly wished to achieve.

² William George Constable, *Art Collecting in the United States of America*, London: 1964. 1.

While motivations behind each art collection may be similar, their styles of collecting still varied widely and gave each collection a distinctive character. All were ostentatious, but some more restrained than others. Each collector was drawn to different styles of art and architecture—telling examples that indicate the innate character of the donor.

1 ART COLLECTING—AN AMERICAN TRADITION

Europeans have collected art for centuries, admiring old masters and ancient works by unknown artists. The church and royalty had the power and economic ability to amass grand collections, and there were vast amounts of artwork to be had. The great collections of the Prado in Madrid, the Louvre in Paris, the Uffizi in Florence, and the National Gallery in London all became public museums in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, although their works were acquired by the mighty hand of the church and the enormous wealth of merchant and noble families. The Vatican in Rome and the Hermitage in St. Petersburg also provide examples of the kind of art the wealthy and powerful could accumulate.

As a fledgling country, the United States had no artistic traditions and no strong religious organization or monarchical ruler to encourage cultural growth. America's wealth only blossomed in the 19th century, after the colonies became independent and the Civil War had ceased. It therefore became the perceived duty of the upper classes to bring art to the new country—the titans of industry undertook this challenge with pleasure. Gilded Age millionaires³ embraced art collecting as both a manifestation of wealth and a philanthropic enterprise. Only the upper echelons of players in the second industrial revolution could afford such purchases—works had to be selected by hired consultants and shipped from Europe, as there was little artwork yet in the United States. Difficulties like acquisition plagued the process of art collecting in the United States. Collectors themselves were often not able to select their own purchases because of the logistical complexities involved in travel to Europe during this era. Albert Barnes, for example, sent friend and artist William Glackens to Paris several times to scout artwork for the new collection he had begun.

³ Duncan, 72.

Economic leaders in America saw art collecting as a way for them, the wealthy class of a new democratic country, to rival European cultural institutions. American society of the late nineteenth century was not yet completely settled and, thus, promoted feelings of inferiority in comparison to the world leaders of the time. Art collecting also linked integrally to the formation of a national identity in the United States. Collecting and museums go hand in hand with development of new cities and advancement in urban centers.

Consequently, early art collections resided primarily in the great houses of major cities in which the patrons of the arts themselves lived and worked. Rapid growth of new American cities brought growth of collecting as well—economic prosperity was essential to increased interest in art and cultural institutions. World’s Fairs like the Philadelphia’s Centennial Exposition of 1876 and Chicago’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 further promoted curiosity about drawing, painting, and sculpture. Fair officials designated sections of the festivals for display of the arts, and they introduced new architectural styles to the masses. Expositions successfully helped the wider American community better understand and more eagerly accept popular art.

Prominent American figures like Thomas Jefferson and other revolutionary leaders collected art in the U.S. before the nineteenth century, but the heyday of collecting began after the Civil War, with influxes of business and manufacturing in the 1870s. The first public art museum in America, however, was the Wadsworth Museum, established in 1842. Daniel Wadsworth (1771-1848), an art patron living in Hartford, Connecticut, founded his atheneum to spread the glories of art throughout the community.⁴ His generosity did not go unnoticed—the atheneum and museum became a popular destination and still functions today. In 1869, William

⁴ “Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art,” 2005, <<http://www.wadsworthatheneum.org>>.

Wilson Corcoran founded the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Corcoran (1798-1888) was a co-founder of Riggs Bank and began the gallery as a home for his private art collection. Corcoran, like other successful businessmen, made his money through the banking industry. Unlike other entrepreneurs, however, he was a patron not only of European art, but also of contemporary American art—an uncommon practice at the time.⁵

Following the opening of Corcoran’s new museum, major cities began creating their own centers of art: in 1870, the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened thanks to generous donations by John D. Rockefeller and other contributors. The same year, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts opened its doors as well. In 1879, the art community inaugurated the Art Institute of Chicago, and one year later, the Cincinnati Art Museum was completed. These accomplishments signaled the importance of art to the new country, and industrialists noticed the reception of such institutions amongst civilians.

Besides the Corcoran Gallery, some of the first donor memorial museums include the Pierpont Morgan Library, now the Morgan Library, and the Phillips Collection. The Morgan Library and art museum connected directly to John Pierpont Morgan’s residence at Madison Avenue and 36th Street in Manhattan. Known today as J.P. Morgan (1837-1913), this financial magnate commissioned Charles McKim of the lauded architecture firm McKim, Mead and White to design a grand palace in which to store and display his treasures. Between 1902 and 1906, McKim supervised the construction of a Palladian style palace in the heart of New York City. The Morgan Library opened to the public in 1924 following Morgan’s death. Recently, noted architect Renzo Piano completed an addition to the library, signaling the significance and relevance of the collection today. Founded later in 1921, the Phillips Collection marked a

⁵ “History of the Corcoran,” <<http://www.corcoran.org>>.

milestone as America's first museum of modern art. Duncan Phillips (1886-1966) was the grandson of James Laughlin, a banker and co-founder of the Jones & Laughlin Steel Company. He and his wife Marjorie Phillips, a painter and fellow art enthusiast, purchased many contemporary pieces.

In addition to the Phillipses and J.P. Morgan, other businessmen also became involved in art collecting and patronage in the early twentieth century. In 1937, Andrew W. Mellon donated his substantial art collection, plus \$10 million for construction costs, to build the National Gallery of Art on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Congress authorized construction of a national gallery earlier that year. Chester Dale, a utilities magnate, was an avid collector of French art; founder of the S.H. Kress & Co. five and ten cent store chain Samuel H. Kress loved Italian Renaissance painting and was another early donor to the National Gallery; lastly, Joseph Hirshhorn, entrepreneur and financier, donated his collection of modern art to the Smithsonian Institution.⁶

With such powerful personalities involved in the accumulation of art, America's public and private art collections soon began to rival or surpass those of most European countries. America had achieved its goal of culturally competing with Europe and was bolstered by this success. Prominent businessmen often acquired art as an element of power and a manifestation of wealth. Some, however, chose to use art in a way that would manifest their own character. Donor Memorials, in particular, those defined as "house-museums,"⁷ can, through architecture and exhibition layout, demonstrate a collector's personality. The creators behind such house-museums earn lasting reputations, are strong-willed and opinionated, and maintain ongoing impressions on society.

⁶ David Lloyd Kreeger, "Remarks," Washington, DC. 13 Mar. 1975. 3-4.

⁷ Anne Higonnet, "Where There's a Will . . ." *Art in America*, May 1989, 65.

2 “MRS. JACK” & THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840-1924) is still one of the most recognized women in the art world today, although she died in 1924 (fig. 1). Her “great personal magnetism and individuality,”⁸ as described by contemporaries, partnered with a fierce determination, brought her to the pinnacle of the social and artistic community of her day. Mrs. Gardner followed in the grand tradition of Catherine the Great of Russia who, without a male counterpart, avidly acquired art according to her own tastes. While the death of Isabella Stewart Gardner’s husband, John Lowell “Jack” Gardner, was not a happy event, Mrs. Gardner’s independence was the impetus for her serious entry into art collecting and display. Her nickname, “Mrs. Jack,” given lovingly by her husband, then, is ironic; she truly was the epitome of a self-sufficient single woman, not tied down by a partner.

Isabella Stewart Gardner was born into a very prosperous New York City family, the lineage of which traced back to the royal House of Stuart⁹, in 1840. At the age of twenty, Miss Stewart married one of Boston’s most eligible bachelors, Jack Gardner. Jack was the grandson of Joseph Peabody, one of the wealthiest men in the United States. The couple had only one son who died at the age of two, and Mrs. Gardner suffered a miscarriage after the first child’s death.¹⁰ After these distressing events, Mrs. Gardner refocused her attention away from family matters towards culture and travel. With no children to constrain her, Gardner traveled frequently and was always at the height of fashion and trend.

⁸ Charlotte Gere, *Great Women Collectors*, London, 1999. 123.

⁹ Diane Wood Middlebrook. “Portrait of a Lady.” *NYTimes.com*. 28 Dec. 1997.

¹⁰ Middlebrook, n.p.

**Figure 1**

John Singer Sargent,
Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1888

**Figure 2**

Interior Courtyard of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

She was in constant company of artists, actors, academics, and writers, and was a central figure in Boston's "bohemian" community.¹¹ And as she herself was quite eccentric, she was also very accepting of other alternative lifestyles, including homosexuality—an understanding rare in the late 1800s.

In 1891, Gardner's father died, leaving her sufficient income to pursue her collection of art. Paintings by Old Masters, textiles, books, and antique knickknacks all interested Isabella Stewart Gardner. During countless trips overseas, she accumulated various works of art. Her first major acquisition was *The Concert* by Vermeer at a Paris auction house in 1892. Mrs. Gardner later became the patron of Bernard Berenson, the great American art historian of Italian

¹¹ Douglass Shand-Tucci. Boston Bohemia 1881-1900. Amherst, MA: 1995.

Renaissance painting, then a recent graduate of Harvard University.¹² In return for her monetary aide, Berenson advised Gardner on sensible acquisitions for the collection—Berenson later became instrumental in creating a market for paintings by the “Old Masters” in America. He helped her select a Botticelli in 1894.

Mr. and Mrs. Gardner had collected art together for many years and began considering the idea of creating a museum before Jack Gardner died suddenly in 1898. With Jack’s and her father’s money, Gardner was able to spare no expense in designing this museum that would become her life’s primary focus. Writing to a friend in the early 1900s, Gardner stated:

Years ago I decided that the greatest need in our Country was Art. We were largely developing the other sides. We were a very young Country & had very few opportunities of seeing beautiful things, works of art, etc. So I determined to make it my life work if I could.¹³

Collectors had the chance to impact the character of America, and felt powerful in that task. As a woman, Gardner had a slighter influence on Boston and American culture than did her male counterparts, but she was able to contribute to society with her passion for art.

“To visit the Gardner Museum is to enter the life, mind, and imagination of the remarkable woman who created it,”¹⁴ wrote the director of the Gardner Museum in 2001.

Gardner created her own little world inside the walls of her museum—a space where everything was tailored directly to her likes and desires. It was also a way for her to communicate to the outside world who she was and how she wanted to be perceived—as an Italian princess.

Through her museum, Isabella Stewart Gardner manifested her ideals, ambitions, and vivacious personality. Instrumental in revealing these traits was the architecture of the building itself (fig.

2). Mrs. Gardner purchased a plot of land in Boston’s Back Bay area—a relatively new

¹² Germain Bazin. *The Museum Age*. New York: 1967. 250.

¹³ Hawley, 62.

¹⁴ Anne Hawley, “Isabella Stewart Gardner,” *Before Peggy Guggenheim*, Venice: 2001. 59.

neighborhood created de novo by landfill in the late 19th Century, known for attracting members of the upper classes¹⁵--to create her home.

In 1896, before her husband's death, Mrs. Gardner hired the architect Willard T. Sears (1837-1920) to draw up plans for a museum. Initially, she intended to rebuild and expand her home on Beacon Street to accommodate exhibition space, but she ultimately decided to buy a plot in the Back Bay Fens that was double the size of her old home (fig. 3).

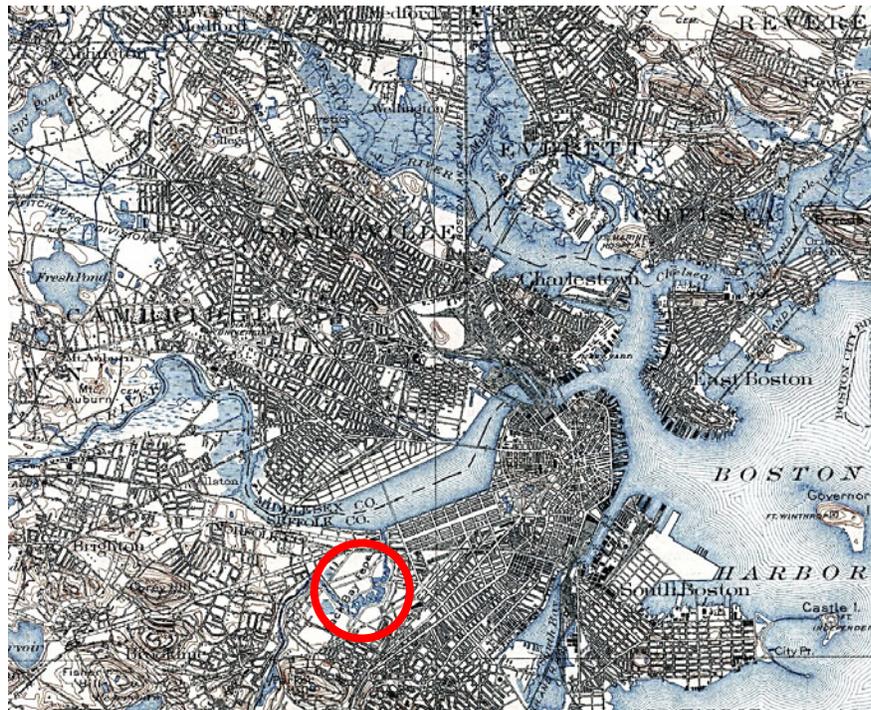


Figure 3

1903 U.S. Geological Survey Map of Boston with the Gardner Museum marked in red

¹⁵ Bainbridge Bunting. "The Plan of the Back Bay Area in Boston." The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. 13, no. 2 (May 1954). 19.

Like many donor memorial museums, the Isabella Stewart Gardner was placed in an area of wealth and high society. Whether to intimidate lower classes from visiting or merely to elevate the status of the institution in the eyes of contemporaries, private art collections tend to reside in great mansions of significant cities, but in districts of prominence. The Back Bay Fens, or the Fenway, boasted lush gardens and tranquil parks—an appropriate setting for what would be a sprawling, Italianate manor, romantic and uninhibited.

Willard Sears was an experienced architect in the New England area and seemed flexible as to Mrs. Gardner's ideas for the new building. On weeklong trips to Venice each year, Gardner acquired a fondness for Renaissance architecture and proposed her museum be designed in such a style. Evoking the power and prestige of the doges and Italian nobility, Gardner presented the idea of an Italianate villa to house her prized possessions. "The Palace," as it was called,¹⁶ was modeled after a fifteenth-century Venetian palazzo, complete with an interior courtyard and Italian paintings to match. Although the building drew from centuries-old Italian designs, Gardner brought the museum into the new industrial age by incorporating modern materials. Alongside antique elements lay concrete structural elements, glass, and steel. Most notable of these technological innovations is the courtyard, protected from the elements by a glass roof, emphasizing light and openness. Mrs. Gardner's museum was part of the quest to forge a new American identity in a time of great wealth and prosperity.

A Venetian palazzo was a strange sight for conservative Boston, a city of mostly brick homes and row houses. Gardner's choice of historically referential European architecture points to just how strange she seemed to the society of the day and how far she strayed from accepted convention in all manners of life. The hanging and exhibitions style, specifically, was one of the

¹⁶ Rollin van N. Hadley, ed. *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner*. Boston: 1987. 442.

most eccentric elements of the museum.

Gardner's museum reflects her eclectic sense of style and unconventional tastes. Prized works include paintings by Dutch master Rembrandt; Italian Renaissance stars Titian, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Botticelli; French Impressionists like Edgar Degas; and 19th century works including those by her dear friend John Singer Sargent. Sargent used the "Gothic Room" as a studio for some time and painted several portraits of Mrs. Gardner that demonstrate her beauty, taste, and uniqueness. "Nothing less than the best Raphael *Madonna*, and the Velazquez *Don Baltasar*"¹⁷ would do in her collection—she wanted to bring the height of European culture to America. Gardner displayed these works from various eras in a specific and premeditated way so as to evoke an emotional reaction from visitors. The setting, a house in which Gardner lived, was much more intimate than most museums of the day—it remains more intimate than many museums still. Many pieces in the collection are unlabeled, as if they are merely there to decorate the living spaces, and lighting is significantly darker than the pure white lighting employed in modern art museums.

The museum is a far cry from any traditional public art museum. The space is cluttered floor to ceiling with fabric by way of drapes and wall paneling, myriad pieces of furniture, antique sculpture, architectural fragments, objet d'art, and a smattering of unidentifiable "things" throughout. With her organization method—or, rather, lack thereof—Gardner formulated a specific physical experience for visitors to the museum. She wanted people to see the wonders of the art just as she did.

The building was completed in early 1903 and was opened to the public on February 23rd of that year. "Fenway Court," another of the museum's many nicknames, has been, since its

¹⁷ Hadley, 260.

inception, a haven for artists, musicians, and students alike. Mrs. Gardner began the first museum music program in America there, inviting the Boston Symphony Orchestra, chamber groups, and others to perform throughout the building. Gardner's passion for her creation is evident not only in the care she took curating the space, but also in the love she felt for the museum until her death in 1924. The museum truly was her home—spiritually and physically. Gardner lived on the fourth floor for a time and would occupy various other spaces in the museum at whim. In her will, she decreed that the fourth floor apartment would be the director's residence—a point which has brought much controversy in the past few decades with trustees' desire to expand the museum.

Mary Berenson, Bernard Berenson's wife, wrote to Isabella Gardner, "I often think . . . of how you worked with your own hands on the Palace, and this inspires me to patience and energy."¹⁸ Gardner's love of art shone through in her museum and the lengths she went to in ensuring its completion. She was neither a pretentious art snob nor an elitist aficionado; she merely wanted to bring as much happiness to others as art had brought to her. The entire museum, not only the pieces Gardner accumulated, was a work of art in itself—a vivid, intricate, and personal setting. A plaque on the exterior of the museum reads: "C'est Mon plaisir"—It is my pleasure. The museum was Isabella Stewart Gardner's pride and joy and, with her strict will and generous endowment, the institution continues to function in the manner that its donor intended. Her ironclad will, a topic of much argument amongst trustees, has allowed the museum to exist in the same state for decades. Museum historian Carol Duncan aptly stated, "In death as in life, Gardner's self-dramatizing presence is felt"¹⁹ throughout her creation.

¹⁸ Hadley, 442.

¹⁹ Duncan, 79.

3 “THE MAN”²⁰ AND THE FRICK COLLECTION

During the Gilded Age, many businessmen began to collect art, but few are as recognized as Henry Clay Frick (fig. 4). Frick (1849-1919) came from a working-class Pittsburgh family and, at a young age, became involved in the new material of steel. He made his first million by the time he was thirty and cornered the coke market by the time the steel market boomed.²¹ Later, he joined forces with Andrew Carnegie at the Carnegie Steel Company, which would later become United States Steel, one of the largest steel manufacturers and distributors in the country. Frick’s friendship with Carnegie was instrumental in firing his interest in art—Carnegie had already begun donating philanthropically and served as an example for Frick. Carnegie also gave Frick his nickname, “The Man,” for his fierce entrepreneurship and vast accumulation of wealth at such an early age. Although his business was based in Pittsburgh, Frick relocated to New York in 1905 after leaving the steel business, largely due to his desire to collect art as well as his need to be at the center of the social world. He rented the old Vanderbilt mansion at 640 Fifth Avenue at 51st Street²² as a show of his great wealth and to upstage his former partner and business competitor, Andrew Carnegie, who had built his home at Fifth Avenue and 90th Street.

Frick was determined to rival his adversary Carnegie as well as European nobility²³ with his art collection. He began by acquiring French academic and salon-style paintings, and later ventured into the genre of the “Old Masters.” Today, the Frick Collection is home to one of the finest collections of European paintings in the United States. Frick’s goal was to bequeath “to the people of his own country” something “complete” and “nearly perfect,” “suitably housed and

²⁰ R. Jay. Gangewere. “Triumphant Capitalism: Henry Clay Frick.” *Carnegie Magazine*, (Mar. Apr. 1997).

²¹ Duncan, 74.

²² Christopher Gray. “Streetscapes/The Frick Mansion.” *NYTimes.com*. 2 April 2000.

²³ Duncan, 73.

amply endowed.”²⁴ He also put his own touch on the museum, hanging a portrait of himself above the fireplace in the study so that he could always oversee the space (fig. 4).

In 1910, Frick purchased a large property at Fifth Avenue and 70th Street. This plot, like Gardner’s land in the Back Bay, was located in an unmistakably wealthy area. Fifth Avenue has always been the center of high society in Manhattan, and Henry C. Frick was aware of such connotations. He always strived to be the best and to have the best—he would have the best mansion at this location, and his collection would surely be noticed. Frick commissioned the firm Carrère and Hastings to design the grand palace that would be his home and showroom. Known for the design of the New York Public Library, the team of Carrère and Hastings built in a Neoclassical style that evoked power and prestige (fig. 5). As a show of aristocratic erudition, Frick chose a French villa to emulate in the design of his new home.



Figure 4

John Christen Johansen, *Henry Clay Frick*, 1943



Figure 5

View of the Frick Collection from Fifth Avenue

²⁴ George Harvey. *Henry Clay Frick: The Man*. New York: 1936. 332.

Frick's home displays an extremely lavish use of real estate—it is a very low building amongst many tall ones, and has a large garden—a luxury unheard-of in an area of the United States with some of the most expensive land values. The museum utilizes very little space in relationship to height and surface area, a choice that suggests Frick's abundant resources and lack of monetary inhibitions. His choice to build in this manner, in this place, indicates his desire for everyone to recognize his wealth and status. This opulence was a manifestation of Frick's unrelenting goal to be seen as "American royalty."

Frick, then, chose architects that could deliver such magnificence. John Mervin Carrère, however, died in 1911 and Thomas Hastings undertook the project himself. Hastings, a graduate of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, had worked in the office of noted architectural firm McKim, Mead and White upon returning to the United States. There, under the tutelage of one of the grandest architectural firms of the day, further cultivated his knowledge of lavish building style. Frick was excited about the partnership with Hastings because of his Beaux-Arts background and knowledge of classical French architecture; elements that would inevitably lend elegance and stature to the new mansion. The building was constructed between 1913 and 1914 in the years immediately preceding World War I—the height of the Gilded Age.

While it covers an entire city block on the Upper East Side of Manhattan (fig. 6), Frick still wanted his home to be private and exclusive. To maintain visibility of the mansion and to keep out unwanted visitors, Hastings set the house back from Fifth Avenue and raised it up above street level, encasing the plot with a short stone wall. Iron gates also mark the boundaries of Frick's land and delineate private space from public.



Figure 6

Map of Manhattan with the Frick marked in red
 “Chief Points of Interest in Upper Manhattan,”
Automobile Blue Book, 1920

To this day, the Collection is exclusive: children under the age of ten are not permitted in the museum, and adults must accompany children under the age of sixteen. The massive three-story limestone palace boasts pedimented windows, archways, pilasters, and intricate carvings. Its setting, too, illuminates the Frick mansion’s luxuriousness: not only does it directly face Central Park but it sits within its own lush garden too—an anomaly in Manhattan. The building was expanded in 1931 and again in 1977 to accommodate more visitors.

Besides the exterior architecture of the building, the interior decoration has made the Frick collection world-renowned. Like Isabella Stewart Gardner, Frick chose sculpture,

furniture, and decorative arts to enhance the rooms of the mansion and to complement his paintings. He purchased objects from J. Pierpont Morgan's estate, including Renaissance bronzes, porcelains, and French furniture. Henry Clay Frick died in 1919, and his wife Adelaide Howard Childs passed away in 1931; after her death, the Frick family and trustees of the Collection transformed the residence into a museum, adding two galleries, the Oval Room and East Gallery, and the enclosed courtyard. The completed structure opened to the public in December of 1935. Although the courtyard with skylight was not an original element of the Frick house, it was in keeping with Mr. Frick's aesthetic ideals and reverence of his art. The vast East Gallery, which leads into the Garden Court, is the crowning glory of the museum, with works by Degas, Turner, Claude Lorrain, Whistler, Goya, Van Dyck, and others.

The Frick Collection became a significant inspiration for later collectors; Henry Clay Frick's paintings affected the tastes of American collectors and his home, too, affected architecture and design in later decades. Frick stated, "I want this collection to be my monument."²⁵ The collection preserves the donor's character and attitude in every detail, as stated in his will, like Gardner and Barnes. The Frick Foundation, a board upon which his children and other close friends have sat, upholds the character of Frick himself in the museum. Beyond that, the collection sustains Frick's legacy through cultural permeation, as it serves as a model for other museums.

Frick's character communicates itself best in the formal and imposing style of the architecture he employed, as well as his display and décor choices. Rich materials, adornment and decoration everywhere, and the exact composition of the building as a whole aptly represent Henry Clay Frick as he was—bold, strict, unrelenting, ambitious, and a forceful presence.

²⁵ Harvey, 336.

4 DR. BARNES AND THE BARNES FOUNDATION

“Albert C. Barnes is the sort of person who gets himself called, variously, ‘crazy nut,’ ‘queer fish,’ ‘genius,’”²⁶ wrote a TIME Magazine reporter in 1927, a mere five years after the Barnes Foundation opened its doors. It is prescient that Barnes already had such a reputation at a time when his museum was still so young. He is known as one of the most stubborn, egotistic, and recognized figures of the art world of the recent past, and his name is still familiar today.

Albert Barnes (1872-1951) had always been a character (fig. 7). From his youth, he was forced to exert himself in order to succeed. Barnes was born the son of a butcher in a poor neighborhood of Philadelphia. He had to work his way through Philadelphia Central High School and later paid for his education at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School by playing semi-professional baseball.²⁷ Barnes was determined to succeed so that his future would be nothing like his underprivileged past. He received a degree in chemistry from the University of Pennsylvania and began practicing as a doctor, but realized that this was not the path for him. Barnes was very ambitious and had his sights on wealth and prosperity; a different lifestyle than that from which he came.

After medical school, Barnes went to work for the company H.K. Mulford, a top pharmaceutical manufacturer, in 1898. It was here that Barnes saw the lucrative nature of the pharmaceutical industry and decided to pursue medicine on an entrepreneurial level. He traveled to Europe for work and there met his future partner, Herman Hille, a German Chemist. Over the course of his travels and experimentation, Barnes cultivated an idea to create a silver compound

²⁶ “Argyrol into Art,” *TIME*, Apr. 25, 1927. 10 Dec 2007 <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,730443,00.html>>.

²⁷ “Fighter from Philadelphia.” *TIME*, 1951. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,856896-1,00.html>>.

that could be used as a topical antiseptic.²⁸ With his charm and persuasive personality, Barnes lured Hille into his scheme in 1900 and got Hille to do the physical work while Barnes focused on marketing and business. Within a year, Hille had created this new antiseptic drug which the pair named Argyrol. Barnes was keen to distribute the product to as wide an area as possible and, with positive feedback from major hospitals, surgeons, and specialists, he and his partner formed the company Barnes & Hille in 1902.

While Barnes may not have developed the actual drug, he was integral to Argyrol's success and widespread adoption. Barnes was a master sales representative and could sell the product to almost any market. Within a few years, Argyrol became commonplace across the world. While Argyrol boomed, the partnership between Barnes and Hill shriveled. The pair was in constant disagreement and could no longer work together.²⁹ The company was dissolved by legal intervention in 1907 and Barnes bought out Hille for 350 thousand dollars, roughly 7.7 million dollars today.³⁰ The company's success—no longer named Barnes & Hille but the A.C. Barnes Company—allowed Barnes to pursue other passions.

As a young man, Barnes was an aspiring artist himself. He gave up painting after countless frustrations, but he always harbored an intense love of art. In 1912, Barnes sent his old high-school friend, artist William Glackens, to Paris to purchase French Post-Impressionist paintings he was drawn to. Always in search of a bargain, Barnes targeted that genre of painting which was shunned by the greater French and European society. Glackens returned to

²⁸ Arthur Williams. "Alfred Barnes, Argyrol and Art." *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, (Dec 23/30 2000). p. 933-4.

²⁹ Caroline Kim, "Albert C. Barnes: The Medici of the New World." *Humanities*, (September/October 2004).

³⁰ Calculated at MeasuringWorth.com, <http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/result.php>.

Pennsylvania with twenty thousand dollars worth of art—the beginnings of one of the finest collections of modern French painting in the world.

While attending seminars given by American philosopher and psychologist John Dewey at Columbia University in 1918, Barnes immediately embraced the idea of science in education and imposed that connection on his love of art. By studying art through a scientific lens, Barnes created a novel system of visual analysis. Dewey and Barnes became close friends and collaborators—Dewey’s influence led Barnes to create the Barnes Foundation four years later in 1922, where Dewey became the first director of education. The founding principle of the institution was nondiscriminatory and objective access to the arts.

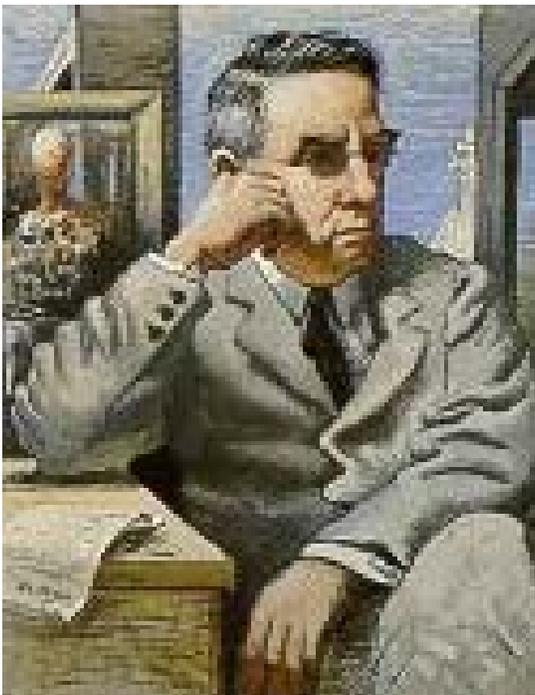


Figure 7
Giorgio de Chirico,
Portrait of Dr. Albert C. Barnes, 1926



Figure 8
View of the Barnes front façade and entranceway

In 1925, Barnes hired Paul Philippe Cret, a French architect living in Philadelphia, to design a new building for the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania (fig. 8). Cret was a well-known architect at the time; as the head of the Department of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, he was a trusted architect and had a strong reputation for modern classical designs. Cret was educated in Paris at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and came to the United States in 1903 to teach in Philadelphia. While Cret focused his work mostly on memorials, civic buildings, and industrial design, his museum and art facility buildings also garnered positive feedback. During the 1920s, Cret worked in a relatively strict Beaux-Arts style, using a vocabulary of academic classicism. His work, though, was slightly more modern than that of other Beaux-Arts architects—he used simplified forms in a monumental classical style, incorporating modern technical innovations. Cret is well-known as the designer of the Rodin Museum and the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, both in Philadelphia.

For Barnes' foundation, Cret created a grand villa reminiscent of a French chateau, although more modern and monumental than Henry Clay Frick's home by Hastings. Barnes built his gallery on the former grounds of Captain Joseph Lapsley Wilson's arboretum and later had Cret build him a home directly adjacent to the gallery. The gallery has twenty four rooms and Barnes' home has twelve. The building, in the French Renaissance style, provides allusions to Palladian villas and royal palaces while maintaining a modern austerity. Vast expanses of creamy, peach-colored limestone are interrupted only briefly by a number of sculptural friezes and classical ornamentation, including archways, moldings, and vaulted windows. The entranceway, a semicircular cutout from the façade, is denoted by four small columns level with the front wall. In the rounded exterior of this entrance vestibule stands the first clue of the creator's eccentricity: a masked African figure expressed in ceramic tile, completely incongruous

with the smooth, classical surface of the rest of the building. Here and in the bas-reliefs by sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, visitors can see Barnes' presence in his foundation. While Paul Cret was a master architect, he was prostrate to the whims of his client, and was often weighed down by Barnes' vision and desires for the final product.

This expansive French Renaissance-style villa atop nearly twelve and a half acres of land, most cultivated as an arboretum, strikes quite a contradiction with its neighboring houses. In an area of colonial-style brick mansions, this light-colored European chateau noticeably stands out. The building, however, is adeptly concealed from the surrounding area by a great iron gate with security checkpoint stations and extensive foliage. Only a small, iron logo signals the entrance—only those who actively look for it will find it.



Figure 9

Map of Philadelphia c. 1900 with the Barnes marked in red

The museum's awkward location in suburban Philadelphia (fig. 9), its admission only by application, and the cultish, inflexible reputation it has cultivated over the years³¹ make the Barnes one of the most notorious art institutions in the United States. Rather than deterring visitors and critics, the Barnes' invariable grumpiness has only heightened appeal and interest in the collection—to an extent. The museum is difficult to access, with expensive parking rates and ticket prices, limited times for entrance, far distances from public transportation, and a haughty mindset that is anything but inclusive. You may feel like a trespasser upon arriving at the Foundation—you are scrutinized and questioned when you drive up to the initial gate, you are watched as you meander through the gardens, and the intensely-packed walls of the galleries make you feel as if you should not even be able to walk through them.

These galleries hold 2,500 pieces, the standouts of which are 181 Renoirs, 69 Cézannes, 60 Matisses, 44 Picassos, 21 Soutines, and 14 Modiglianis. He also amassed thousands of African, South American, and other indigenous sculpture, painting, and jewelry. These pieces are displayed mostly in cases and upon furniture. The paintings, however, are arranged on tan burlap-covered walls to facilitate easy removal and repositioning—something Barnes did on a constant basis. The pieces, however, are not hung in any ordinary manner. No, Barnes created his own method of aesthetic evaluation. He hung paintings, interspersed with metalwork tools, in what he named “wall ensembles”—completely symmetric organizations based on line, color, light, and form. In this way, Barnes was able to be an artist himself, drawing elements from each work to create his own larger masterpiece. Such hanging methods illuminated Barnes' unique approach to art.

³¹ Peter Schjeldahl, “Untouchable: The Barnes Foundation and its Fate.” *The New Yorker*. Feb. 16, 2004.

In 1929, just before the stock market crash, Barnes sold the A.C. Barnes Company and devoted himself to art and the Foundation full-time. He busied himself with collecting art of all varieties, not limited to painting but including sculpture, furniture, antique tools, and more. Barnes' mannerisms were much like Gardner's in that he exhibited works in a cluttered exhibition style. Barnes, however, was even more eccentric and idiosyncratic because of his obsessive-compulsive nature to have everything even, symmetrical, and color-coordinated. Rumor has it that the color of the Foundation's exterior limestone matches the skin tone of the over 180 Renoir paintings in his collection. Even after his death, Barnes has a steadfast hold on his foundation; in his will, he stipulated that nothing could be moved on the walls to ensure that his vision and aesthetic philosophy would be preserved indefinitely. This stipulation has caused much upheaval in the art community and in Philadelphia in general, as groups fight to move the Barnes Foundation to Center City to make it accessible to a wider audience.

Much like Frick and Gardner, Barnes installed artwork in a historicizing home that he personally designed and oversaw.³² The Barnes Foundation, though, is unparalleled in its breadth and variety of work. The collection is truly extraordinary, and the manner in which Barnes hung the works is at least intriguing, if not to one's personal tastes. The quirkiness and strangeness that personifies the Barnes, as well as its creator, is one of the best things about the institution. It provides a vastly different experience to viewing modern French masterpieces than if they were hung in an institutionalized fashion at, say, the Musee D'Orsay. While Barnes was not an artist himself, he created a masterpiece with his museum. It is a work of art in itself in the way he designed and curated it. His hanging style, though eccentric, does illuminate elements of

³² Anne Higonnet, "Whither the Barnes?" *Art in America*, 82 (March 1994). 66.

the artwork that would not have necessarily been noticed otherwise. Although Barnes died in a tragic car accident in 1951, he lives on inside the walls of his creation.

5 THE JEWEL ON FOXHALL³³—THE KREEGER MUSEUM

“A privately endowed museum often reflects the personal tastes and predilections of its founder and benefactor.”³⁴ David Lloyd Kreeger (fig. 10), best known as the former CEO of GEICO, the Government Employees Insurance Company, and Washington, DC-area philanthropist, addressed members of The Arts Club of Washington in 1975. Only sixteen years after Kreeger and his wife, Carmen, began collecting art, their personal tastes and characters were evident not only in the collection, but in the building of the museum as well.

David Kreeger (1909-1990) was not born an art collector, however. The son of Russian immigrants who owned a grocery store in New Jersey, Kreeger was born to a humble family in 1909. Always a music lover and aspiring musician, Kreeger was able to work his way through college at Rutgers University and law school at Harvard by playing piano for summer resort-goers. He graduated with honors from both institutions. Although he primarily studied law, he glimpsed his first view of art and the opportunities it could offer at Rutgers. There, a course in art history taught by Dr. Thomas Munro, later the Curator of Education at the Cleveland Museum of Art,³⁵ inspired in him a deep and constant interest towards art. Although Mr. Kreeger would focus on his law career for the next few decades, he never forgot that initial exposure to the creative world.

Mr. Kreeger practiced law for a time at a private firm in Newark, New Jersey, and was later recruited by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration to join the legal staff of the Department of Agriculture. He then transferred to the Department of the Interior, also serving as legal counsel. This turn of events was quite fortunate, as Mr. Kreeger met his wife, Carmen, a

³³ The Kreeger Museum, <<http://kreegermuseum.org/>>.

³⁴ Kreeger, “Remarks,” 1975. 5.

³⁵ Henri Dorra. The Kreeger Collection. Washington: 1970. 9.



Figure 10
Mr. Kreeger at the house under construction



Figure 11
Photograph of the Kreeger Museum

Puerto Rican woman, while working for the Department of the Interior. Carmen would later become integral to David's growing interest in art and the cultivation of their private collection.

In 1946, he returned to private practice in Washington and, in 1948, he assembled a group of investors who bought into the fledgling GEICO company. In 1957, he gave up his law practice and served as Senior Vice President and general counsel of the company and its affiliates. David Kreeger became the President of GEICO in 1964 and chairman and CEO in 1972. He retired in 1974.

While Kreeger was known widely for his leadership in GEICO, he also achieved respect through his great philanthropic enterprises and activity in the arts community. He was integral in sustaining and encouraging the Jewish community of Greater Washington—he donated money to

fund the Kreeger Auditorium at the Jewish Community Center in 1969 and was also the national vice president of the American Jewish Committee. Mr. Kreeger was a trustee emeritus of American University and served on the boards of Georgetown University and the Peabody Institute of Music, supporting education in Washington as well.

An accomplished amateur violinist, David Kreeger frequently hosted chamber music sessions at his home and invited visiting musicians, including Isaac Stern, Pinchas Zuckerman, his good friend and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, the Cleveland Quartet, and countless others to play with him. To this day, the Kreeger Museum continues the tradition of music amidst art in yearly summer concert series, the June Chamber Festival, and regular musician visits complete with master classes. Mr. Kreeger actively embraced each of his passions and, with that in mind, headed the National Symphony Orchestra as president from 1970 to 1978. He also strongly supported the Washington Opera and he served as its first president and later as chairman. He served on the boards of the Arena Stage, a Washington theater company, Dumbarton Oaks, and the National Gallery of Art as well. Lastly, he served as president and chairman of the Corcoran Gallery of Art for nearly 20 years until his death in 1990.

Each of the roles he assumed shaped his presence as a community figure. Amidst these various activities, he and Carmen began an art collection. It started innocuously enough, as Mr. Kreeger professed in his speech to the Arts Club of Washington.³⁶ He drew an analogy to alcoholism in his explanation of art collecting—both are addicting and all-consuming passions. Even this comment signals his wit and humor. David and Carmen's relationship with art began first in their art history class at Rutgers and continued with their appreciation for art museums. The young couple decorated the walls of their first apartment with Impressionist and post-

³⁶ Kreeger, 6.

Impressionist painting reproductions. As David Kreeger's success as a lawyer grew, the pair was able to purchase an Abstract Expressionist painting by Mordecai Ardon, an Israeli artist. This first painting marked the start of an extraordinary journey for the Kreegers. Works by local Washington artists followed the Ardon, until David and Carmen purchased in a Renoir, a Corot, and a Courbet. The variety of these first pieces represents the widespread and eclectic nature of the Kreegers' collection. Although the works may seem dissimilar, there is a constant underlying connector through each painting and sculpture—each piece serves as a direct expression of the Kreegers' personal tastes. Bright colors and impressionistic pieces categorize the Kreeger collection. Like Barnes, though, Kreeger was drawn towards African art and purchased many sculptures and crafts in that style. Sculptures of Indian gods flank the entrance to the museum, while Rodins, Lipchitzs, and Maillots reside within. These works may be incongruous, but they show the different tastes of David Kreeger—just what a donor memorial is supposed to do.

"I never bought art as an investment. I bought it for love and was lucky. Art that embodies the creative spirit of man transcends the value of money,"³⁷ said Mr. Kreeger. He emphasized this point in countless speeches given throughout the Washington area: his love and appreciation for art, the personal joy it brings, and the joy and entertainment it may bring others. He ascribed much of collecting to pure chance as well as the priceless enjoyment it brings. Unlike other collectors, Mr. Kreeger was often described as humorous and witty. He never took himself or his art too seriously, a characteristic that the museum reflects. He and Carmen bought

³⁷ Glenn Fowler. "David Lloyd Kreeger Dead at 81." [nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). 20 Nov. 1990. <<http://www.nytimes.com/>>.

what they thought aesthetically pleasing, not what they thought they should buy or what would necessarily complement previous pieces.

Today, the collection comprises mid-19th century romantic Realism, exemplified by Boudin, Diaz, Daubigny, and Corot; Impressionism as seen in the many works by Monet, Renoir, Sisley, and Degas; post-Impressionism—van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne; and abstraction, of which Kandinsky, Gorky, Ernst, Miró, Avery, Lipchitz, Calder, and Picasso serve as prime examples. The Kreegers also ventured into less standard territory, with acquisitions of works by members of the Bay Area School, including David Park, Diebenkorn, and Bischoff, and many African sculptures and masks. John Walker, former Director of the National Gallery of Art, praised the collection as “one of the truly distinctive collections of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, put together with great taste.”³⁸

The Kreegers chose art instinctively, but wisely. Their collection seems to be a harmonious and complete whole. The slogan of the Kreeger Museum is “Embrace Art, Architecture, and Music.” This statement reflects the spirit of the Kreegers and their belief that the three elements were not mutually exclusive. Their taste and aesthetic ideals embraced not only art and music, but architecture as well. As their art collection grew, Mr. and Mrs. Kreeger knew they would need a bigger space in which to showcase the works. In 1963, the Kreegers approached world-renowned architect Philip Johnson to design a new home for them and their burgeoning collection (fig. 11). At the outset, Johnson was not interested in this commission; but after seeing the Kreegers’ collection, he was so impressed with the scope and quality of the works that, as a collector himself, he could only accept the offer.

³⁸ Dorra, 9.

Philip Johnson was, at the time, one of the best-known architects in America. He attended the Graduate School of Architecture at Harvard University and had the great fortune to study under and work with Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer.³⁹ After graduation, Johnson became the first Director of the Department of Architecture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Also studying under Mies van der Rohe and working with him on the Seagram Building in New York, Johnson became a great proponent and practitioner of International Style Modernism in America. During the 1960s, Johnson was experimenting with different styles, incorporating traditionalism and post-modernism. But his own Glass House, 1949, served as inspiration for his horizontal, simple design.

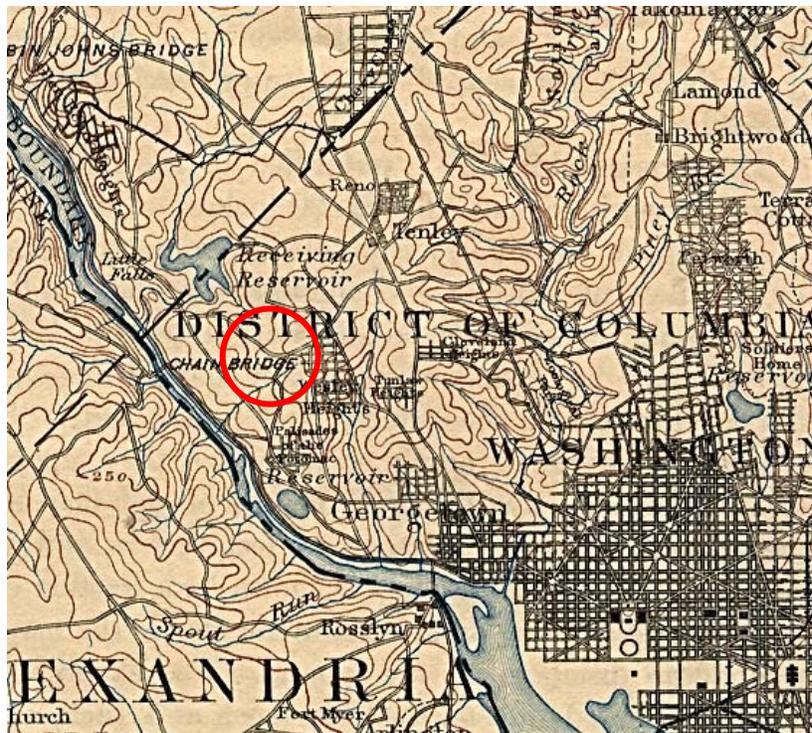


Figure 12

1894 U.S. Geological Survey Map of Washington, DC with the Kreeger Museum marked in red

³⁹ Philip Johnson. "The Philip Johnson Papers." New York: 1995.

The Kreeger house was planned for a six-acre plot of land on Foxhall Road in Washington, an elite area of DC (fig. 12). Dignitaries and diplomats make their homes on this beautiful, winding street in the northwest portion of the city. Perceptions tied to the area most likely influenced the Kreegers' decision to build here, although visible power was not a top priority of Mr. and Mrs. Kreeger. While an address on Foxhall denotes wealth and stature, the road is also desirable because of abundant natural elements and sweeping views of the Capitol. Before the neighboring Field School, an expansion of the former Cafritz estate, began recent construction projects, the Kreeger site offered vistas to the Potomac River and beyond to the city.

While Mr. and Mrs. Kreeger never imagined, in the early years of their marriage, that their home and collection would ultimately become a museum,⁴⁰ they began the design of their house with strong ideas of what functions the space would have to serve. Not only would the building be a living space for David, Carmen, and their two children, but it would serve other purposes as well. In keeping with David Kreeger's love of music, the couple required that the house be acoustically sound and that space be provided for musical performance and entertainment. And, of course, the display of the art collection was an essential element in the new home design. Mr. and Mrs. Kreeger, however, vehemently argued for the integration of these numerous elements, rejecting schemes where each function was separated from the others. They wanted a space in which to enjoy their art, their music, and their family at the same time. Additionally, the couple wanted the design to incorporate the surrounding lushness of greenery enveloping the plot.

Choosing Philip Johnson to design their home was a bold and ostentatious choice for DC in the 1960s. Kreeger, Frick, and Barnes all came from humble beginnings and worked their

⁴⁰ Richard L. Feigen, "Commentary," *The Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David Lloyd Kreeger*. Ed. Margy P. Sharpe. Richmond, VA: 1976. 9.

way up from nothing. Thus, their successes were meaningful to them and they wanted to manifest these triumphs. For Kreeger, it was with a Philip Johnson-designed home and extensive art collection. The house is a wonderful blend of old and new—travertine, glass, steel formed into arching compartments reminiscent of Roman antiquity and Byzantine churches—much like his art collection of twentieth-century abstract impressionism and masks and sculptures that are hundreds of years old.

At its completion in 1968, the house cost almost two million dollars, the equivalent of 11.6 million dollars in 2006.⁴¹ No luxury was spared—Italian travertine comprises the majority of the building, and each piece was laid with exceptional care. It serves as an appropriate home to the Kreeger Collection: modern and harmonious. The elegance of the building, too, highlights that same characteristic of the collection, and of the collectors themselves. David Kreeger was an extremely wealthy and successful man, but he was rarely boastful of his possessions and gave back to the community in as many ways as possible. The Philip Johnson building, both classical and contemporary, was a brilliant compromise of gallery and living space, and public and private. While the Kreegers inhabited the house, they opened their doors to the community several times a year.⁴²

The building, like the collection, is an entity rather than separate linked portions.⁴³ A module of 22 feet squared dictates the size and shape of each room, making the whole aesthetically pleasing. On the outside, undulating arches show the differentiation of spaces, and these curves are manifested in the shallow domes on pendentives capping the 22 by 22 cubes of

⁴¹ Historical dollar value calculated at <<http://www.dollartimes.com/calculators/inflation.htm>>. One dollar in 1968 is equal to 5.82 dollars in 2006. The inflation rate over this time period is 4.74%.

⁴² J. Carter Brown. "The Kreeger Achievement." Richmond, VA: 1976. 8.

⁴³ Sharpe, Margy P. "The Kreeger House." Richmond, VA: 1976. 11.

the interior. Johnson best illuminates this strategy in the great hall, the main space of the Kreeger Museum. The ceilings here are double height, both for acoustic and aesthetic reasons; the great hall is the space used for music concerts. Grand glass walls line the back of the house, providing views of forest and lawns. The house is decidedly modern, though Johnson's vocabulary harkens back to the architecture of Antiquity and the Renaissance, recalling "cannons of proportion" and pavilion-like masses.⁴⁴ The arches and domes also evoke images of Byzantine architecture, and the colonnade flanking the pool signals inspiration from Roman Antiquity.

An interior solarium that houses vegetation native to Puerto Rico, Carmen Kreeger's home, architecturally links the Kreeger Museum to other house-museums like the Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Frick. The use of skylights in each of these structures signals the importance of light and air to the collectors. Again, great halls in each building echo one another and illuminate a popular style of display.

In 1994, three years after David Kreeger's death in 1990, the Kreeger Museum opened to the public. Still accessible only by pre-scheduled docent-guided tours, the Kreeger remains exclusive, whether intentional or not. The Kreeger is unknown to many average Washingtonians, while those who have experienced its bounties praise the museum. Its location, its relatively unmarked entrance, and its inaccessibility by any transportation means other than the car, continue to support its status as a "diamond in the rough," or an unknown jewel. The museum, additionally, has no elevator and is not handicap accessible, further limiting its visitor base. And, until very recently, children under the age of twelve were strongly discouraged from

⁴⁴ Sharpe, 12.

visiting and the museum was not open on weekends, a prime day for museum patronage. The museum still does not open on Sundays and Mondays.

It should be mentioned that although children were not encouraged to visit for a time, the Kreeger has done an exceptional job with public outreach, hosting at least two school tours or children's programs, including Story Time and Artists Workshops, for children ages five to twelve each month.⁴⁵ The museum also hosts annual concert series open to all.

While it is a wonderful museum, the Kreeger suffers from lack of exposure and publicity. The Kreegers' collection and former home seem complete and united, and manifest the sensibility and utilitarianism of their owners. While some of the best-known house-museums, the Isabella Stewart Gardner, the Frick Collection, and the Barnes Foundation serve as perpetual memorials to their founders, the Kreeger Museum is more of an indirect homage to David and Carmen Kreeger by the architect Philip Johnson and the museum staff. The artworks speak for themselves and are not cluttered with the whim and inflexible desires of collectors that seem to plague other collections.

The Kreeger building itself may be ostentatious and flashy, but it is one of the few examples of donor memorials where the collector attempted to establish a new architecture for his home and gallery rather than appropriating known forms to garner some cultural response. Gardner, Frick, and Barnes all chose well-known homes of royalty as inspiration for their museums, while Kreeger sought to create a new structure that would relate the purpose of the building. Kreeger is also a bit different in that his exhibition style was more respectful of the art and visitors' right to their own response to it. The galleries are uncluttered and allow for private contemplation while the other donor memorials do not provide this luxury. The Kreeger

⁴⁵ The Kreeger Museum, n.p.

collection is rather idiosyncratic and the building represents a daring stylistic choice, but the museum, on the whole, seems to work well. The Kreeger Museum, unfortunately, is much more hidden and unknown than the other museums discussed, possibly because of the more private nature of the donor himself.

CONCLUSION—THE FATE OF THE DONOR MEMORIAL

“[A] visit to a donor memorial is often structured as a ritual enactment of a visit to an idealized (albeit absent or deceased) donor,”⁴⁶ states museum historian Carol Duncan. The architectural choices, works in the collections, and display philosophies converge to create a sense of the overwhelming influence of the collector when inside one of these museums. This idea was never clearer than in examinations of the collections of Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Clay Frick, Albert C. Barnes, and David Lloyd Kreeger. In the examples of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Frick Collection, and the Kreeger, their museums were their homes—direct manifestations of their characters and personalities. And while the Barnes Foundation was not Albert C. Barnes’s house, it was the place where he could most completely carry out his aesthetic desires. The Kreeger Museum serves as a slight foil to these other collections in its lack of personality directly imposed by its donor. Choice of location, motivation, and public/private relationships, however, connect each museum to the others.

Isabella Stewart Gardner, Barnes, Kreeger, and, to a certain extent, Frick, chose out-of-the-way, elite locations for their homes and museums. While each museum is technically located in a major city, the buildings tend to reside on outskirts and near-suburbs. The donors did wish to be philanthropic in their collecting but, during their lives, it was mostly a selfish undertaking. Collecting art was an activity that largely satisfied their own pleasures and enhanced their individual everyday lives. Even after the donors’ deaths, the difficulty visitors have in viewing the collections signals the initial intentions of the collectors and their hoarding tendencies. Reservation-only tours of the Barnes and the Kreeger, and age limitations at the Frick also contribute to such reputations of elitism and exclusivity.

⁴⁶ Duncan, 72.

These museums represent a bygone era, a phenomenon of the past—lavish, over-the-top homes signal a booming American economy and pride of country. Donor memorials hark back to the Gilded Age and the height of competition amongst the cultural elite—these museums serve as the embodiment of a unique period in American history where it was fashionable to flaunt wealth in a certain manner.

Donor memorials and private museums, though, have been heavily criticized in the past. As John Anderson and Anne Higonnet espouse in *Art Held Hostage* and “Whither the Barnes?,” respectively, private art collections no longer hold the same prestige they once did. Accessibility in all aspects of life now puts these private collections at a disadvantage, as people do not want to be confined to the eccentric wishes of the deceased when viewing art. They want art to be displayed in an objective manner so that they may form conclusions on their own, rather than have work presented for them in a specific manner they may or may not appreciate. Visitors and critics often describe institutions like the Barnes, the Frick, and the Gardner as egomaniacal and esthetically fantastic⁴⁷. In the 1980s at a time when the Barnes was struggling financially, the museum finally agreed to loan several paintings to a traveling exhibition. This show was labeled as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see masterpieces that had heretofore been intentionally hidden from the public. By advertising the show in such a way, the larger institutions implied that the Barnes and, by association, other donor memorials like the Gardner, Frick, and Kreeger, were outmoded institutions governed by selfish private interests⁴⁸ that did not cater to the public. Similarly, each museum faces criticism of display styles as cluttered, overcrowded, disconcerting, and distracting from the artwork. Clarence Weinstock, Marxist literary and art critic, wrote of the Frick, “Look twice at the junk shop which struggles through the salons and

⁴⁷ Higonnet, “Whither the Barnes?,” 62.

⁴⁸ Higonnet, “Whither the Barnes?,” 63-4.

fills the corners of the smaller cabinets . . . So much ground is given to the untouchable bric-a-brac that one gets cock-eyed looking at the pictures.”⁴⁹ This statement, though made about the Frick, could be applied to the Gardner or the Barnes interchangeably. As some people do not appreciate certain types of art, they also may not appreciate this type of art museum.

Now, the era of the donor memorial is waning. The quirkiness and wonderfulness that epitomize these museums have also planted the seeds of their downfall. Today, alternate paths for well-to-do patrons and collectors are more followed, like bequests of collections to large public institutions. While this may seem more philanthropic, it may be equally as selfish as creating a museum to yourself—wings and sections of public art museums are unavoidably more widely noticed and recognizable than small private art museums. Recent bequests of this category include the Perelman Building at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Lehman Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Steinberg Newman Collection of abstract impressionism to the Metropolitan as well. While creating donor memorials may be passé, those that exist today will remain as symbols of their time and will continue to garner attention and admiration. “The wish for something eternal is written into the very architecture of donor memorials,”⁵⁰ wrote author Carol Duncan—perhaps collectors like Gardner, Frick, Barnes, and Kreeger knew that their lifestyles would soon become obsolete and, in building their memorials, created snapshots of their lives from which future generations could look upon, learn, and reminisce.

⁴⁹ Duncan, 76.

⁵⁰ Duncan, 83.

IMAGE CREDITS

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