The Art Museum as Personal Statement: The Southwest Experience

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THE ART MUSEUM AS PERSONAL STATEMENT

THE SOUTHWESTERN EXPERIENCE

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The museum boom in this country since World War II has been easy to observe and document. Almost as many museums were constructed in the 1960s as in the previous two decades, and the erection or expansion of cultural palaces has continued into the 1980s. The rising importance of museums has been signaled not only by new buildings and massive additions but also by attendance figures. The leading public attraction in the United States is neither professional football nor baseball; it is the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. This overwhelming public response is not limited to the "Big Apple," for museum attendance has soared across the nation, particularly in the Southwest. The art museum has long since dropped its patrician stuffiness and become a place where the masses enjoy the beautiful and the historical.[1]

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Indeed, the art museum rivals the shopping mall as a site for family excursions. The residents of the Southwest have participated in the museum boom, generating new institutions and new buildings along with national media attention, in a proclamation of the region's cultural maturation. It has not always been so, however.

In 1948, the artist, critic, and scholar Walter Pach published a survey of American art museums that featured a state-by-state description of the best the nation had to offer. Arizona and Oklahoma were not even listed. The entries for Colorado and New Mexico were one-sentence statements about museums at Denver and Santa Fe. The descriptions for the entire states of Texas and California fell far short of the entries for cities like Boston, Detroit, and Toledo, let alone New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia.[2] Yet in the 1980s, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Saturday Review*, *Time*, and other national newspapers and magazines have offered extensive coverage of art museums in Los Angeles, Houston, Denver, Tulsa, and other southwestern cities. How does one account for this belated regional participation in the museum phenomenon?

There appear to be two major factors in the emergence of the Southwest as a home to mu-

seums rivaling those of the Northeast and Midwest. One obvious factor is the rapid urbanization and economic growth of this portion of the so-called Sunbelt. The Southwest was transformed by World War II as its population swelled and its economy diversified. The transformation continued into the 1960s as Houston, Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Diego, Dallas, Denver, and other urban centers witnessed growth that doubled, tripled, or even quadrupled their populations in only two decades. The new urbanites were younger, wealthier, more cosmopolitan, and eager to demonstrate the prosperity of the region to the rest of the nation.[3] They did so by forming symphony orchestras with internationally-known conductors and opera companies capable of touring New York and Washington to critical acclaim. They also built new art museums designed by eminent architects and filled their galleries with objects purchased at extraordinary prices.

The other major factor in the emergence of the art museum as cultural artifact in the Southwest is the individual patron or family creating either a "vanity" museum or shaping a public museum's collection through sheer weight of generosity. Many of these "twentieth-century Medicis" were not natives of the region but came to the Southwest to establish fortunes in petroleum, real estate, banking, newspaper publishing, or agribusiness. Their largess became the basis upon which art collections were formed and buildings were erected, creating institutions of national and international reputation. Indeed, most of the art museums of the Southwest owe their prominence to their personalized nature.

The great urban art treasuries in the United States typically originated through art associations rather than individuals. The museums of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia served as models for Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. The public art museum found its heritage more in the revolutionary wave that produced the Louvre than in the elitism of the great European private collections. Wealthy Americans donated paintings and sculpture to public museums that proliferated across the Northeast and Midwest, but not until the twentieth century did private collectors turn to the vanity museum as a shrine for their connoisseurship.[4] The public "art palace" in America, with its democratic spirit, came to be rivaled by private collections reflecting the egos of the donors, and the impact of federal tax laws. The masses flocked to these new museums, proving, as one critic wrote, "people who live in palace-museums don't need them. People who don't, do."[5]

Southwesterners and other Americans have no monopoly on the formation of private art museums. The Medici mentality can be seen in the Kroller-Muller Museum in Holland or the Courtauld Galleries in London, as well as in the Frick Collection in New York or the Walters Gallery in Baltimore. Some art patrons gave shape to institutions the way Mrs. Potter Palmer molded the Art Institute of Chicago. Although the recent opening of the Terra Museum in Chicago demonstrates that new private art museums are not limited to the Southwest, that region exhibits a strong dependence on the patronage of individuals rather than art associations or government appropriations. The use of dedicated trusts to establish a museum and to endow its operations and collection development is an American phenomenon that has reached its apogee in the Southwest. As Lewis Mumford wrote, the museum becomes "a manifestation of our curiosity, our acquisitiveness, our essentially predatory culture."[6]

In the Southwest entrepreneurs began to collect art in the same way that they acquired business enterprises, and they often had the fortunes to purchase art at times when others could not. Their wealth allowed them a means for self-expression and later the basis for a gift that guaranteed them a kind of immortality. Cities in the region, struggling for recognition, eagerly accepted the gifts in a quest to create an instant culture. As a leading scholar of museum history has written, somewhat cynically, "The magnificent flowering of museums in the United States in less than half a century is the spontaneous creation of the American public whose richest citizens have thus acquitted their debt

FIG. 1. *Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas. The three museums pictured display strikingly different styles of architecture.* Courtesy of Stark Museum of Art.

FIG. 2. *Thomas Gilcrease (right) and unidentified friend in front of the original building of the Gilcrease Institute. Note the Indian bird motif above the door.* Courtesy of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

FIG. 3. *Front entrance of the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas.* Courtesy Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum.

to the less fortunate."[7] Yet, one must ask, what is the quality of these artistic repositories? Is it possible to acquire works of art in this century that would establish a collection worthy of the older museums in the East or in Europe?

In his syndicated newspaper column, Edward J. Sozanski spoke to these questions:

> A private art collection is a private indulgence, and, as such, it does not have to satisfy any public obligations or expectations. Nor need its owners rationalize its forms or apologize for any of its perceived excesses or deficiencies. But, when such a collection enters the public domain, particularly as a self-contained museum, it invites closer scrutiny. The vanity museum is the highest form of ego gratification to which an aesthete can aspire.[8]

To provide justification for its existence, the personal museum needs to demonstrate distinction through exceptional concentration in a specific type or period of art, an exemplary model of connoisseurship, or a refined or contemplative ambience. The Southwest provides numerous examples to which these criteria may be applied.

MUSEUMS OF WESTERN AMERICAN ART

One group of museums in the region reflects

FIG. 4. *Frederic Remington's "A Dash for the Timber" (1889) displayed in the main gallery of the Amon Carter Museum.* Courtesy Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

their founders' love of the West—its geography, heritage, and the values they believed indigenous to the West and its residents. These collectors sought art that portrayed what William Goetzmann has called "the West of the imagination."[9] They purchased sculpture and paintings that depicted the courage and tenacity of the settlers and their triumphs over the weather, wild animals, and the native population. Amon G. Carter, Sid Richardson, William Foxley, and H. J. Lutcher Stark formed major collections of Western and frontier art and presented their holdings to the public in an effort to preserve a heroic past and to maintain the virtues seemingly represented by the frontier experience.

Amon Giles Carter grew up in frontier Texas before moving to Fort Worth where he formed the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* in 1909. He created a financial empire based upon the newspaper, early investments in American Airlines, and successful petroleum exploration. His tastes in art reflected his personal experiences, and his acquisition of Frederic Remington's "A Dash for the Timber" in 1945 established him as a prominent collector (fig. 4). He formed the Amon G. Carter Foundation to create a museum to house the four-hundred oil paintings, watercolors, and sculptures in his original holding. He dreamed of an art museum for the people of Fort Worth; Carter described it as an

"artistic enterprise." After Carter's death his children and the foundation pursued the dream and erected a Philip Johnson-designed building to house a collection that grew to more than six thousand works of art. The museum stands on a hill with its facade facing downtown Fort Worth, which Carter largely created. Backed by the foundation's wealth, the Amon Carter Museum became far more than a gallery devoted to Remington and Charles M. Russell and emerged as a major repository of American art.[10]

Another Fort Worth millionaire, Sid Richardson, eschewed the opportunity to move beyond the world of Remington and Russell and built a collection almost exclusively of their works. Born in Athens, Texas, in 1891, Richardson entered the oil business at age twenty-two and within two decades acquired a fortune based upon petroleum, land, and cattle. He bought his first Russell in 1942 and told Bertram M. Newhouse of the Newhouse Gallery in New York City to form a collection for him. During the next five years Newhouse built up the Richardson holdings to more than eighty paintings that were transferred to the Sid Richardson Foundation. Although it had access to enormous assets, the foundation did not acquire additional artworks after the death of its founder but did build a small, handsome gallery in downtown Fort Worth to display the Richardson Collection. This would have pleased its developer who "didn't like Western landscape artists—he wanted cowboys, Indians and horses in his paintings." Richardson found in Russell and Remington the vitality and motion that he associated with the West.[11]

Although he made his fortune in ranching and agribusiness in the Great Plains, William C. Foxley moved from Omaha to Denver where he established the Museum of Western Art. The museum was created "to give people the optimism and self-reliance of the frontier." From his own experience as a schoolboy and a "greenhorn" working on a ranch in Montana, Foxley identifies with the "environmental and human characteristics indigenous to the American West." The Museum of Western Art houses 130 paintings ranging from Foxley's first acquisition, Russell's "Wolves Attacking Cattle in a Blizzard," to works by Georgia O'Keeffe, Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and even Jackson Pollack. Foxley built the collection not through dealers but by targeting specific paintings in private hands and making ever-increasing monetary offers until the owners sold. Following his acquisitive, entrepreneurial nature, Foxley developed a holding that for him represents "a healthy slice of the rare frontier spirit of the American West."[12]

H. J. Lutcher Stark inherited timber property in eastern Texas and then made additional investments in petroleum and banking. Following the example of his mother, who collected porcelains, lace, and European art, Lutcher Stark began to acquire paintings while he was an undergraduate at the University of Texas. After he married Nelda Childers in 1943, they vacationed in Colorado and New Mexico every summer, stopping in Santa Fe and Taos to purchase paintings. Lutcher Stark formed a large collection of Western art, especially the work of Herbert Dunton, and in the 1950s acquired more than two hundred paintings by Paul Kane and a substantial number of Audubon prints and letters. His wife purchased Steuben glass and porcelain birds. The Nelda C. and H. J. Lutcher Stark Foundation received this diverse collection and erected the Stark Museum of Art in Orange, Texas, to house it (fig. 1). Opened in 1978, the two-story marble building contains objects that reflect Charles Wilson Peale's admonition to form a museum to house "the wonderful works of Nature and Curious Works of Art." Orange thus acquired a themeless museum that reflected Lutcher Stark's love of the West and its art as well as his family's eclectic tastes.[13]

Thomas Gilcrease also lavished affection and great wealth on Western art, but for an entirely different purpose. His vast collection of American art, manuscripts, books, and Indian artifacts did not laud the Anglo conquest of the frontier, but instead celebrated the cultures of both the Indians and the white settlers (fig. 2).

The quiet, unassuming Gilcrease, born in Louisiana in 1890, moved with his parents to Indian Territory where he received part of his education from the Creek poet Alexander Posey. One-eighth Creek Indian, Gilcrease obtained an allotment of tribal lands near Tulsa that was situated in the heart of the Glen Pool oil field. By 1917 more than thirty wells on Gilcrease's property produced the beginnings of a major fortune. Gilcrease used his wealth to form production and exploration companies and to acquire banks and substantial real estate holdings. By the mid-1920s he had established an office in Europe and made extensive tours of the continent. While in Paris he decided to create a collection of materials to record the history of the American Indian. He acquired manuscripts, books, and artifacts, largely in Europe, and soon had one of the finest holdings in the country. He also added to his collection of western art pieces, which he had purchased at very low prices in a market that denigrated their importance.

Living briefly in San Antonio, he exhibited his paintings in a gallery in the company offices. He found that San Antonio had little interest in his collection, however, and he returned to Tulsa. Through the Thomas Gilcrease Foundation he established The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art and continued his program of acquisitions to the point of near bankruptcy in 1953. Because of intervention by the City of Tulsa, the Gilcrease Collection remained intact and in the city. While some dealers and other collectors considered the oilman eccentric, Gilcrease's good friend Frank Dobie called him "one of the islands of humanity." Thomas Hoving describes the collection of 70,000 books and manuscripts, 300,000 Indian artifacts, and thousands of paintings as "the most outstanding collection of American painting and Indian art in the country."[14] Gilcrease formed an institution far different in concept and goals from those of Carter, Richardson, Foxley, and Stark, but it was a repository that reflected his heritage and personality.

Women as Collectors

The personalization of museums in the Southwest is not limited to native male millionaires who sought to preserve the spirit of the frontier. As critic John Mason Brown has so inelegantly stated, "Women are the Typhoid Marys of American Culture."[15] Indeed, female residents of the Southwest have formed some of its major collections and have created and endowed several of its important museums. Some of these women came to the region from the East and became enamored with Indian and Hispanic arts and crafts. Alice Bemis Taylor, Mary Cabot Wheelwright, and Millicent Rogers provided the public with repositories of indigenous art. Other "Typhoid Marys" formed outstanding collections of Old Master European paintings, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works, and contemporary European and American art. The legacies of Marion Koogler McNay, the Putnam sisters of San Diego, Wendy Reves, and Dominique de Menil have produced museums or museum collections strongly reflective of their taste and wealth.

Alice Bemis Taylor's family came from Boston to Colorado in the 1880s. In 1921, after she inherited a fortune from her father, Taylor made her home in Colorado Springs where she became a critic, patron, collector, and benefactor. Trips to New Mexico and Arizona led to the acquisition of first Indian and then Hispanic arts. An indefatigable collector, Taylor became known in Colorado Springs as "Lady Bountiful." Trips to Santa Fe led to meetings with collectors such as Frank Applegate and Governor Arthur Seligman, and following their deaths she purchased their Indian and Spanish Colonial holdings. In addition Taylor developed a large anthropological and archeological library and expressed the desire to place her books and collection in a museum or research institute. Other cultural leaders in Colorado Springs persuaded her to donate $400,000 to build the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center

FIG. 5. *Millicent Rogers dyeing velvet at Tony House, 1948.* Courtesy of the Millicent Rogers Museum, Taos, New Mexico.

with the Taylor Museum as an integral part. The dignified benefactor of the arts thereby not only created a center for the study of native Southwestern peoples but also provided the residents of Colorado Springs with a cultural complex of enduring worth.[16]

Similarly, Mary Cabot Wheelwright came from a distinguished Boston Brahmin family, was well educated, and had traveled extensively in Europe. In middle age, she visited a dude ranch near Alcalde, New Mexico, in 1918, seeking something new in her life. She later wrote, "I went to the Southwest where I seemed to get near something I had always wanted, a simple way of living, more adventurous and more exciting than the safety of Boston." Wheelwright purchased a home near Alcalde and became part of the intellectual circle of William P. and Alice Corbin Henderson in Santa Fe. She turned her energies and wealth toward collecting artifacts to preserve the heritage of the Navajo culture and religion. Strongly influenced by Navajo singer Hastum Klah, this regal Victorian lady traveled through the tribal lands on horseback, sleeping on the ground, becoming convinced that "to study man without his religion is like studying the ocean without the tide." Aided by Hastum Klah, Wheelwright sought first to create a "House of Navajo Religion" but then expanded her vision to form the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian. William P. Henderson designed a large building in the form of a Navajo hogan that Wheelwright built in Santa Fe in 1937. She filled the museum with blankets, sand paintings, and other objects that sought to promote understanding between Indian and non-Indian peoples. The museum reflected her metaphysical quest in the Southwest, what Wheelwright called her "Journey Towards Understanding."[17]

The Millicent Rogers Museum in Taos celebrates the connoisseurship of Millicent Rogers, granddaughter of Standard Oil partner Henry H. Rogers (fig. 5). The tall, elegant Rogers inherited part of a fortune estimated at $150 million. A New York debutante in the Jazz Age, Rogers married three times, each union ending in divorce. After she moved to California, Rogers was asked by a friend, actress Janet Gaynor, to accompany her on a trip to New Mexico. Millicent Rogers fell in love with the Land of Enchantment and soon moved to Taos. Long known in society circles for her clothes and jewelry, Rogers used her exquisite taste to build a collection of Pueblo pottery, Navajo silver jewelry, and Apache baskets. At a time when prices were low, she developed substantial holdings of the very best arts of the Southwest. Selecting blankets, Santos, and Indian shirts and blouses with great care and skill, she filled her adobe home with native arts as well as paintings by Renoir and Whistler. After her death in 1953, Rogers's family formed the museum whose holdings reflected her keen mind and intellectual bent. The collection shows the aesthetic development of a complex multicultural society, the goal Millicent Rogers had set for it.[18]

Marion Koogler McNay shared Rogers's enthusiasm for New Mexico folk art but moved far beyond that as a collector. The spoiled daughter of a Kansas physician, McNay studied painting in Chicago and was captivated by the exhibit of the Armory Show at the Art Institute in 1913. She subsequently married a Texas "doughboy" ten years her junior and moved to San Antonio. Her husband died during World War I, but she remained in Texas. The discovery of oil on her father's lands in Kansas gave her the resources to collect art for more than thirty years. While she lived in Taos and studied art there, and was married briefly to a local artist, her collection moved beyond the Southwest. After building a substantial Spanish Colonial Revival home in San Antonio (fig. 3), she acquired a small but exquisite collection of French Impressionist paintings. Her holdings included Renoir, Cezanne, Gauguin, and Picasso. Her virile tastes led to the acquisition of a large number of American watercolors, prints, and drawings. When she died in 1950, McNay left the house and grounds and the collection to the city of San Antonio with an endowment to purchase Post-Impressionist and contemporary art. Subsequent additions to the museum

contain gifts from several San Antonio collectors, to form a diverse holding of very high quality.[19]

Whereas Marion McNay's background and training led her to purchase works largely of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Putnam sisters of San Diego used the wealth of their family to acquire European Old Master paintings, thereby giving their adopted city one of the finest such collections in the nation. Housed in a Spanish Colonial Revival building in Balboa Park, the San Diego Museum of Art began to receive anonymous gifts of Old Master paintings in the 1930s. Director Reginald Poland knew well the identity of the generous benefactors: they were the reclusive Putnam sisters, Anne, Irene, and Amy. The Putnam family had arrived in San Diego in 1913 from New York, and the father of the sisters prospered in real estate, hardware, and banking. Raised in a cloistered, Victorian environment in the family home, the Putnam sisters received a private education in languages, philosophy, religion, and art. They traveled to meetings with Poland in a curtained car and visited the galleries to see "their" pictures in the evening after the museum had closed. Working with leading dealers and experts in New York and Europe, the sisters took advantage of the desperate situation on the continent before 1939 to purchase Old Masters at discounted prices. Guided by scholarly opinion and their own tastes, they purchased works by Goya, El Greco, Titian, Van Dyke, Rubens, and Rembrandt. Soon the museum had the finest collection of Spanish Baroque, Italian Renaissance, and Dutch Old Master paintings on the West Coast. The national—indeed international—reputation of the museum was the result of the Putnams' role. The sisters's largess continued until 1950 when Poland retired and the Putnams cut their ties to the institution. Through their Putnam Foundation the sisters continued to purchase major pieces and loan them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and other museums. Fearing the loss of these paintings to other cities, arrangements were made in San Diego to house the Putnam holdings in a separate jewel box-like building, the Timkin Gallery, which became a monument to the Putnams and their generosity.[20] The sisters gave shape to the museum and the heart of its impressive collection.

New York model, international socialite, and art collector Wendy Reves likewise has provided a distinct flavor to the new Dallas Museum of Art through a gift that reflects her connoisseurship and that of her late husband. Born Wyn-Nelle Russell in Marshall in rural eastern Texas, Wendy Reves became a John Robert Powers model in New York and part of the international set in the years before World War II. In 1949 she began a life with Emery Reves, although they were not married until fifteen years later. Emery Reves (originally Revesz), a Hungarian Jew, formed an anti-fascist news syndicate in the 1930s and became a confidant of Winston Churchill and other allied leaders. He wrote extensively and prospered as a publisher and editor. Emery and Wendy Reves purchased Coco Chanel's home in the south of France and filled it with art and distinguished guests. The Reveses acquired paintings by Cezanne, Monet, Gauguin, Renoir, Van Gogh, and Degas as well as Chinese porcelains, iron work from the Middle Ages, Spanish and Middle Eastern carpets, rare books, and decorative arts. They also held a large body of Winston Churchill memorabilia. After the death of Emery Reves in 1981, it became known that the collection might be available to a museum.[21]

The aggressive leaders of the Dallas Museum of Art were ready to act. The museum had a long history in the city, having been founded in 1903, but its collection varied in quality and had few Old Masters or major pieces of Impressionist art. In the 1960s, as the local economy boomed, civic leaders determined that Dallas needed a new museum with a first-class collection. As often happens, the building came first. In 1977, Edward Larrabee Barnes was commissioned to design a new museum and two years later voters approved a bond issue of almost $25

million to pay for part of the structure even as private donors gave an additional $20 million. Civic leaders joined the museum's young director Harry Parker to find paintings. They targeted Wendy Reves, courted her assiduously, and won a commitment.[22]

The museum agreed to her terms in order to obtain what they did not have—a major collection of seventy Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. Dallas had no Renoirs; Reves was offering eight! But the price was steep. She demanded that the museum recreate six of the principal rooms of her home, Villa La Pausa, with the furniture, paintings, tapestries and other furnishings as she had them arranged. Furthermore, the collection would also include the iron works, Churchill memorabilia, and decorative arts, to be displayed as a unit. To get this treasure trove, the museum directors ordered Barnes to redesign an area of the second floor of the new building at a cost of $6 million to house "The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection." The Reves gift doubled the value of the museum's permanent collection, but at some sacrifice. The museum's collection is not united, and the reconstructed rooms place the paintings a great distance from the viewer. The wing houses a strange combination of Churchill memorabilia, iron works, decorative pieces, and tapestries.

One New York art authority noted, "Texas museums are perceived as being on the make. They're energetic and extremely well heeled."[23] That comment describes the rise of the Southwest as a force in the international art world as powerful, wealthy collectors came to dominate the marketplace.

Four Dominant Collectors

Four collectors symbolize that presence: Kay Kimbell, John and Dominique de Menil, Norton Simon, and J. Paul Getty. They created institutions that exhibited outstanding masterworks and they had the financial resources to dominate galleries and auction houses for more than three decades.

In 1935 Velma Kimbell persuaded her husband, Kay, to accompany her to a Fort Worth Art Association exhibit. There the quiet, modest entrepreneur found an eighteenth-century English hunting painting that so appealed to him that he knew he had to have it. Bertram Newhouse sold Kimbell the first of many paintings, and over the next two decades he and his sons guided the Kimbells on a quest for the best in Renaissance, British, and nineteenth-century French painting (fig. 6). Born in rural Texas in 1886, the shy, hardworking Kimbell mastered the marketplace in flour and grain and began to build a business empire. By the 1960s, from his headquarters in Fort Worth, Kimbell led some seventy corporations in food manufacturing and distribution, petroleum, real estate, and insurance. From the time he acquired his first painting Kimbell became an inveterate museum-goer. On every business trip he visited museums, and he and his wife continued to purchase paintings that soon overwhelmed their home. Loans to colleges, universities, and libraries did not achieve Kimbell's desire to "share what he had with others."[24]

The Kimbells created the Kimbell Art Foundation in the 1930s to own the art works, and Kay Kimbell willed his entire interest in all of his firms to the foundation. Upon Kimbell's death, his wife donated her share of the community property as well. Armed with a valued collection and an endowment in excess of $100 million and charged to create in Fort Worth a museum of the "first rank," the foundation commissioned Louis I. Kahn to design a building for the museum. A detailed and carefully constructed planning document produced a building lauded by critics and architects worldwide. The distinguished Japanese architect Arata Isozaki calls the Kimbell simply "the best building in the United States."[25]

Realizing that his good friend Amon Carter was forming a major collection of Western American art and that the Fort Worth Museum of Art desired to build a modern art collection, Kimbell had decided to fill the void with European paintings and sculpture. The directors of the Kimbell built on that core collection of

two hundred pieces, using the foundation's resources to buy paintings from the Renaissance and scrolls from the Orient as well as pre-Columbian art. The collection was broadened after 1981 with the acquisition of works by Velasquez, Chardin, Watteau, and Picasso, many of the paintings being masterworks in prime condition. As early as 1982, Thomas Hoving called the Kimbell "America's best small museum," housed in a building he declared to be a "flawless success." Thus the modest Kimbell and his wife provided Fort Worth with a museum that carried out his plan, a serene place of silver light to house the best and the most beautiful, an art museum of truly the first rank.[26]

Although final judgment on the recently opened Menil Collection of Houston is years away, John and Dominique de Menil have strongly influenced art in the Southwest. Long before their treasury opened in Houston, John de Menil had served as an advisor to the Kimbell Art Museum. His wife, Dominique, continues to serve on the board of directors of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and as chairman of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Their connoisseurship underlies the Menil Collection, and its disparate holdings echo the variety found in the Reves Collection in Dallas.

FIG. 6. *Velma Kimbell (left) with Mr. and Mrs. Louis I. Kahn at opening of Kimbell Art Museum, October 1972. The painting in the background is "The Concert," c. 1740, by Philippe Mercier.* Courtesy Kimbell Art Museum.

Opened in June 1987, the Menil Collection is the $150 million private holding of the de Menils, housed in a building designed by the Genoese architect Renzo Piano, who also produced the Pompidou Center. The collection ranges from paleolithic times to the twentieth century, with emphasis on expressionist and postexpressionist art. The ten thousand objects reflect the de Menils' interests in Greek and Roman antiquities, African art, and the Cubists and surrealists. When asked what characterized the collection, Dominique de Menil responded, "Maybe a passionate curiosity for the past and also a vulnerability to poetry—the poetry of a Cubist collage that sings a miraculous song, poetry of images revealing the beauty and mystery of the world, whether the image is a small and tender Vuillard or a stunning Magritte."[27]

Born in Paris in 1908, the daughter of physicist Conrad Schlumberger, Dominique de Menil inherited a substantial fortune in the oil-servicing company Schlumberger Limited. She married Parisian banker Jean de Menil (changed to John in 1962), and in the late 1930s they began to purchase art. When John paid $2,000 for a Cezanne watercolor Dominique was shocked and her mother soon feared their acquisitions would lead them to poverty. But their discovery of Max Ernst (from whom they bought one hundred works), Miro, and Braque simply whetted their appetite. "We became totally unreasonable," Dominique recalled. "It was folly. We borrowed money to buy art."[28] Forced to flee to the United States when the German army occupied Paris, the de Menils moved to Houston, became American citizens, and continued to add to their art collection. They became a force in the Houston Museum of Fine Arts and created art history centers at the College of St. Thomas and Rice University. These "modern Medicis" demanded control over the programs they supported, and if they did not receive it they moved on to other projects.

Using the Menil Foundation as a vehicle, they spent thirty years acquiring the impeccable. Known to Houston civic leaders and to art dealers as the "steeled butterfly," Dominique de Menil decided after her husband's death in 1973 to use their fortune, estimated at $200 million, to create a museum in Houston to house their collection. Other Houston foundations helped fund the $25 million building she developed with Renzo Piano. When the collection was placed within the museum even she was shocked: "My, my goodness, we did buy a lot of things," she declared. One of the last great private collections in the United States, its opening brought critics from around the world to visit the quiet, dignified building and its noncomprehensive collection. Private passions had been transformed into a public statement that added immensely to the culture of Houston, Texas, and the Southwest.[29]

Likewise, southern California has benefited from the creation of two of the finest vanity museums in the world. Norton Simon and J. Paul Getty and their foundations not only opened museums of extraordinary range and quality, but continue to acquire works of art at an astonishing rate and at astonishing prices. The result has been the creation of an entirely new art atmosphere in southern California.

Although not a native of the region, Norton Simon made his home in southern California after becoming a highly successful entrepreneur. Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1907, Simon moved to San Francisco as a young man. There he developed a food processing firm, and in 1943 he formed Hunt Foods and turned it into a $1 billion conglomerate during the next three decades. In 1954 Simon bought his first paintings for a new home—a Gauguin, a Bonnard, and a Picasso. "I was hooked," he said.[30] Simon read art books voraciously, visited museums, and met with gallery owners. By the mid-1960s he was prepared to enter the international art market with a vengeance. He purchased the entire Duveen Brothers art gallery and the building in which it was housed for $15 million, then bought works by Rembrandt, Raphael, Monet, Degas, and other masters at record setting prices. Soon Simon had spent over $100

million on art. Angered by the policies of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the feuding by his fellow directors, Simon resigned from its board and in 1974 prepared to create his own museum.

Fortunately for Simon, the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art had grossly overextended itself in constructing a large building without an endowment to maintain the facility. Its desperate directors asked him for aid. He agreed to pay their debts, to repair and remodel the building, and to continue to display their small but impressive collection of modern art. But they had to accept his terms: a name change to the Norton Simon Museum of Art and total control of the policies of the museum. They agreed, and when the museum reopened in 1975 it housed the various Norton Simon holdings and his wife, Jennifer Jones Simon, chaired a hand-picked board of directors. Simon seized the opportunity to "pick up" a museum just as he had acquired food processors for the conglomerate. He told reporters that he wished "to clarify unmistakably that the museum is to become an institution of the type of the Frick Collection in New York."[31]

With assets in excess of $100 million, the Norton Simon Foundation acquired outstanding Dutch and Flemish works and then added some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings of outstanding importance. The collection was broadened to include Matisse, Utrillo, and Modigliani and strengthened in French Impressionism. Degas bronzes, Barbizon landscapes, and Picasso's "Woman With Book" helped form an impeccable and increasingly comprehensive holding. Consumed with a restless energy to locate and acquire the very best works, Simon proved not to be an adventurous collector, but he demonstrated a passion for purchasing blockbuster masterpieces. By 1987, the Simon holdings had an estimated value of $750 million and the museum had become one of the most remarkable art collections in the world.[32]

The furor over soaring prices for art increased dramatically with the rising fiscal strength of the J. Paul Getty Trust and its voracious acquisitions. Born in Minneapolis in 1892, J. Paul Getty moved with his family in 1903 to Oklahoma Territory where his father entered the petroleum business. Educated at the University of Southern California, the University of California at Berkeley, and Oxford University, Getty toured the National Gallery in London and the Louvre as a young man beginning a lifelong interest in art. He worked on his father's oil properties in Oklahoma during the summer and developed his own petroleum holdings. A millionaire by age twenty-three, Getty divided his time between his home in Los Angeles and Europe. After the outbreak of the Great Depression, he began to purchase works of art at very low prices. After buying his first painting in 1931, Getty fell in love with English and French furniture and by the late thirties was collecting in earnest. Getty read extensively in art books and journals and made a decision to collect Greek and Roman antiquities, Renaissance paintings, eighteenth-century French furniture, and classical carpets. The growing Getty fortune allowed him to increase his rate of acquisition, particularly after he moved permanently to England in 1957. Vast profits from Middle Eastern oil investments encouraged Getty to furnish several homes with his growing treasury.[33]

In 1953 he created a trust to build a museum in southern California, and plans were developed to construct the facility on his Malibu ranch. There Getty desired to display part of his holding in what he referred to as "my Taj Mahal." A $17 million museum would house a collection worth $200 million. Having developed a holding largely in a depressed market and in several areas not favored by contemporary tastes, and taking advantage of American and British tax laws, Getty ordered that a reproduction of a Roman villa be erected on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean. He did not want some "tinted glass and stainless-steel monstrosity" for his collection. Opened in 1974 to less than positive notices, the Getty Museum

was criticized both for its architecture and the unevenness of its collection. Getty never saw the museum before his death in 1976 but undoubtedly felt the slings and arrows of its detractors, who noted that he had refused to enter the competition for the finest Old Master paintings and that the collection did not compare in quality with Kay Kimbell's or Norton Simon's. He defended the building, arguing, "What could be more logical than to display [classical art] in a classical building?"[34] But what of the French furniture, Renaissance paintings, and Persian carpets?

The museum staff and trustees of the foundation assumed that they would benefit from a Getty endowment, but they were unprepared for the largess provided in his will. Getty gave the museum his private art collection and his entire fortune worth $700 million. That sum soared to $1.25 billion when Getty Oil Company was sold. Federal law required that the trust spend almost $100 million per year on its activities, and consequently the trustees have engaged in a policy of major purchases and in the planning of a huge new museum in Brentwood. They have initiated programs in the areas of art education, art history, and preservation.[35] Nevertheless, the richest museum in the world is still under assault for the quality of its holdings and the "modest" nature of its acquisitions. Few museums in the country so closely reflect the personality of their benefactors as the Getty.

CONCLUSION

There are other vanity museums in the Southwest that reflect a private passion for acquisition and display of art and crafts, and there are also public museums whose collections have been shaped by the generosity of one patron or family. William Randolph Hearst in the 1940s and Joe Price in the 1980s gave the Los Angeles County Museum of Art much of its flavor, although in entirely different areas. Cities without such patrons have not fared as well. There are handsome art museum buildings in Phoenix, Tucson, Corpus Christi, and Amarillo that lack major strength in any area of their holdings; meanwhile Austin, Oklahoma City, and El Paso lack anything resembling a comprehensive art museum.

The art boom in the Southwest in the last thirty years has been fueled by the rise of vanity museums provided by private collectors. The museum expansion parallels the rapid urbanization of the region and its economic modernization. In the absence of strong, broad-based art associations in most cities, urban leaders sought the donations of private collectors who in turn used their massive wealth and the federal tax laws to create ego-appeasing monuments to their connoisseurship. The absence of historic commitment to the arts in the urban Southwest has not precluded the establishment of opera, ballet, and theatrical companies and symphony orchestras capable of gaining national recognition. But these cultural amenities have not achieved the public fame and critical acclaim of the art institutions. Entrepreneurs have pursued paintings, sculptures, and the decorative arts in the same way they acquired corporations, ranches, and mineral rights, and they have created art museums bearing their names to establish an immortality that transcends the vagaries of Wall Street. The trend continues unabated: international business figure and Occidental Petroleum chairman Armand Hammer has announced the construction of a $30 million museum in Los Angeles to house his $250 million art collection. Ironically, this newest private treasury will not be part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art but will be located a few blocks down Wilshire Boulevard, next to Hammer's corporate headquarters.[36] As the last region of the country to urbanize and to achieve economic maturity, the Southwest has embraced the private art museum to demonstrate cultural adulthood, and wealthy collectors have responded with monumental art palaces for the masses.

NOTES

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7. Bazin, *The Museum Age*, p. 261.

8. Edward J. Sozanski, "The Menil Collection," *Bryan-College Station* [Texas] *Eagle*, 16 October 1987.

9. William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1986).

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