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THE ROCKEFELLER BORADS AND MUSEUMS

A resume of RF and GEB programs

by

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See JM's letter of 12/8/55

Copy in GEB files

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THE ROCKEFELLER BOARDS AND MUSEUMS.

Interest in museums seems to have originated in the General Education Board in the early nineteen twenties, where it was represented by the late Charles R. Richards, who under a grant of the Board, made in April, 1919, to the National Society for Vocational Education, had served as its director of an "industrial art survey of national scope." (See the introduction to his book Art in Industry, New York, Macmillan, 1922.) From this inquiry, Mr. Richards proceeded to a more general study of museums, "for the sake of the educational and cultural service they can render" (GEB Annual Report, 1922-23, p. 32), apparently made for the Board by Mr. Richards on loan from his position as Director of the American Association of Museums. By 1926, the results of these studies were formulated and published in two volumes, The Industrial Museum, 1925, and Industrial Art and the Museum, New York, Macmillan, 1927; and the Board had authorized the establishment of a Division of Art Applied to Industry, of which Mr. Richards became the Director.

In the next year (GEB Annual Report, 1926-27, p. 26) was reported a major grant of \$350,000 to the Philadelphia Museum toward the development of a wing to house a museum of industrial art. In its next report (1927-28, pp. 26-27) were reported grants of \$75,000 over three years to the American Federation of Arts for circulating exhibits on industrial art; \$5,000 to the Art Center of New York for an exhibition of the arts in Mexico; \$4,500 to enable Mr. Richard F. Bach, Associate in Industrial Arts in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, to study the economic foundations of design in the "art industries." The Report for 1928-29 (pp. 19-32) includes a summary of the Board's interest in the field, and records two further grants (p. 83) \$150,000 to the Pennsylvania Museum toward the endowment of a chair for "an expert consultant in industry," and \$12,500 toward the cost of an exhibit, The Architect and the Industrial Arts, held at the Metropolitan Museum. At the retirement (for age) of Mr. Richards on June 30, 1930, the Division of Industrial Art came to an end, with three new grants reported (Report, p. 45): \$15,000 additional to the American Federation of Arts for circulating exhibits; a total of \$150,000 to the Art Institute of Chicago toward the endowment of a school of industrial arts and a chair on the same subject; and \$8,000 to Ohio State University for a scholarship in ceramic design, applied to table ware.

In addition, the Board, quite apart from this concern with industrial art, in 1928 appropriated \$500,000 to Harvard University for endowment for the new Fogg Museum.

The later interest of the Board in Museums developed in connection with its so-called General Education Program, which was in effect from 1934 to 1940, and aimed to encourage the development of a more adequate general education, particularly in the secondary schools and the early

years of higher education. This interest was represented in grants totalling \$39,300 to the Cleveland Museum of Art, from 1935 through 1946 for studies of the art abilities and interests of children; and in a series of grants, in 1939, toward experimental projects in general education in cooperation with secondary schools to The Art Institute of Chicago (\$20,700); The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy - Albright Art Gallery (\$19,200); The Cleveland Museum of Art (\$14,700); The Milwaukee Art Institute (\$14,600); and The Museum of Modern Art (\$20,100).

No major grants for museum work were made by the Board after 1940. As will be seen, during the preceding years it appropriated for such work, mainly its educational aspects, a total in excess of \$1,400,000. (This statement does not attempt to deal with minor allocations for conferences, studies, etc.)

With the appointment of a Director for the Humanities in The Rockefeller Foundation in 1929 (the late Edward Capps), museum work became a concern of the Foundation. But references to it in grants of the years of his directorship were incidental to major concern with classical studies and archaeology (e.g., \$14,000 in 1931 to The American School of Classical Studies, Athens, for a museum of antiquities for the Island of Lesbos).

Museum work, properly speaking, first emerged as an interest of the Foundation in a statement of New Program in the Humanities, prepared for the Trustees by Capps' successor, David H. Stevens, and approved by them in April, 1935. The substance of this statement, under the heading, "Museums, libraries, and orchestras in community life," ran as follows:

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Among community institutions serving cultural needs, museums, libraries, and orchestras stand out as reaching a public comparable in size to that reached by drama, motion picture, or radio. Their position in community life, moreover, is peculiarly influential. The service they render, besides establishing their claim to maintenance from community funds, has accustomed the public to look to them for cultural satisfaction. Consequently, any effort on their part to introduce new values should quickly gain public attention and support. Recently, certain of them have been endeavoring to make their influence more widely felt. In the past, despite repeated protestations of their educational functions, they have given more attention to the conservation of objects and of standards than to public enlightenment. But lately, criticized for their failure to meet needs which others were quicker to discern, those responsible have begun to take an interest in making their institutions active agencies for adult education. Dominated as their practice is by traditions to some extent outworn, progress has been slow... More hopeful, however, are the cases where institutions have extended their educational activities to meet depression needs of a wider public... Assistance to a few

well-conceived demonstrations might thus serve to make educational services, undertaken as depression measures, regular features of museum, library, and orchestra activities... How museums are responding to this general situation is evidenced by a report on their educational activities prepared by Mr. Leonard Outhwaite. The report concludes:

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"The museums of the country, particularly the arts museums, are suffering from many social and educational concepts inherited from the past. They are at present aware of new demands and new possibilities but are without a plan of action, even without definite plans for educational program. From the very nature and position of the museums, it seems possible they may come to play a very important part in adult education and leisure-time activities, but there is as yet no definite evidence or assurance that this will be the case."

Encouraging is the prevailing interest in the educational possibilities of branch museums, in studies of the behavior and response of museum visitors, in the use of radio to extend a museum's influence, and in book-lists to lead visitors whose attention is caught by exhibits on to further study. These are perhaps indications that museums eventually will become really educational institutions, whose aim

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"would be to receive and orient the visitor, to teach him the methods and purposes of the various arts, the components entering into the creation of a work of art, and so to give him an understanding and a grasp of the practical as well as the ideal elements of esthetic criticism. It would aim to show him the relationship between the arts and the other aspects of social living, both in the present and past ages. In contrast with the policy of most of the present-day museums, the educational exhibition halls would proceed by stages from the simple pictorial, human, and easily understood arts to such as would not have an obvious relation to the interest and activities of the present time, to those of a more formal, abstract, historical, recondite, and technical character."

There are today definite opportunities to aid in demonstrations of how museums may exemplify these aims in their practice. The Brooklyn Museum, for instance, is at present carrying on significant experiments in museum techniques and educational activities, on account of which it may deserve special attention... It is believed that the Foundation can advantageously participate in the efforts of museums, libraries, and orchestras to enrich the cultural life of the communities which they serve. A limited

program of aid to such institutions would be valuable as a demonstration of desirable innovations in their activities. Since such demonstrations can take effect only as qualified personnel is available, provisions should also be made for the support of centers developing plans for training that meet the needs for these three types of community service realistically. The urgency of re-educating and broadening the outlook of workers now bound by traditional procedures is evident. Equally urgent is encouragement for individuals who recognize the larger opportunities confronting museums, libraries, and orchestras. Expenditures need not be great. Relatively small investments in fellowship funds for representative training centers will bring large returns.]

1934 1934 to 1939, summarized experience in this field as follows:

Thus far museums have been studied and given aid on a much more restricted basis than libraries. The interest of officers in the potential values of museums for popular education derived from unusual opportunities in our own country to aid experiments in training personnel and in testing methods of display. The Brooklyn Museum had secured large Federal appropriations for reconstruction work, and its Director showed unusual ability to turn this opportunity to good account. His plans called for the appointment of groups of internes in two successive years. Each of the six persons in each group had particular knowledge of some element of museum practice, but not always on traditional lines of operation. Among the twelve were an expert in ventilation and another in fabrication of glass and metal cases. Others were chosen for their knowledge of lighting, display arrangement, and preparation of catalogs. At the end of the Brooklyn project a similar one was started at the Buffalo Museum of Science. This time men were taken from positions in museums to which they returned, whereas from Brooklyn the persons went on to other museums which wished to capitalize their experience in working out special problems. The Buffalo Museum went to an international basis for its selection in order to develop a project in classifying and displaying its new collections of ethnological materials from the southern Pacific. Three young American scholars were assigned to this work with men brought from China, Australia, and Great Britain. The productivity of this second project gives clear proof that the social values of museums can be developed and demonstrated under intensive training programs with clearly marked objectives... We know that improving the educational power of museums can be increased by such work on personnel, but we do not know how to estimate public response to the various types of exhibit set up in our larger museums.

Neither do we know enough regarding the techniques for successful circulation of educational exhibits of all classes from major centers to libraries, colleges, and smaller museums. The New York Museum of Science and Industry has had \$50,000 from the Foundation to use with other funds during its first two years in a new location. Careful record is being kept of public interest in the great variety of scientific and industrial demonstrations that are installed there for periods of varying length. Attendance comprises all age groups and is sufficiently large for sound statistical study.

In a similar report by Mr. Stevens covering the three-year period from 1939 through 1941, only two major grants for museum work were recorded. \$75,000 to the Museum of Modern Art for its educational program, and a further grant of \$25,000 to the New York Museum of Science and Industry for the development of new methods of museum management.

In Mr. Stevens' next report, covering the years 1942 to 1947, diminishing concern with museum work is clearly reflected:

Interest in work through museums, never a major concern of humanities program, virtually lapsed during the war years. Immediately after the war, grants-in-aid enabled key museum personnel, responsible for the reorganization of museum services in countries cut off by the war to renew their acquaintance with developing methods of work in other countries. Recently awarded fellowships will make it possible, for example, for one Chinese and two Korean museum directors to study American and Canadian methods. But little assistance in the development of method was possible in the years under review.

The limited interest in museum work which persists in the program lies in such development: how can museums so present their materials that their significance may be more readily and fully appreciated? In 1946, a grant-in-aid to the Museum of Modern Art in New York made it possible to experiment with the presentation of Indonesian objects in an exhibition which attracted wide attention and which undoubtedly realized new possibilities of presentation. If proposals which promise similar advance are made, they should undoubtedly have consideration even if such grants do not bulk large in total program. There is important work of this kind to be done, and it should not be neglected if opportunities occur for aid.

In Mr. Stevens' final report, before his retirement at the end of 1949, such assistance received only brief mention:

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Support of museum work has been intermittent but fairly substantial in the nature of training personnel and of special studies. Under UNESCO some support is going to the international work of museums. It is expected that any grants of Humanities for such purposes will be carried under grants in aid.

In the first statement of program submitted to the Trustees by his successor, Mr. Charles B. Fahs, this phase of earlier program comes to termination:

"We believe that we should withdraw from general work with libraries and museums."

As indicated, museum work never constituted a major interest of the Foundation in the Humanities. Major grants from 1934 to 1950 totalled only \$302,500.* Grants-in-aid and fellowships, not considered here in detail, would probably not bring that total to more than \$350,000.

If I may add a personal appraisal of this record of Foundation concern with museums, I should say that the most effective and significant grants were those which bore directly on the development of methods by which museums could make their holdings more aesthetically accessible to their public. First and foremost in this category, I would place the grants to the Brooklyn Museum and the Buffalo Museum of Science for "internships" for younger museum personnel. The directors of those museums at the time, Mr. Philip Youtz in Brooklyn, Mr. Chauncey Hamlin in Buffalo, were firmly committed to the idea that such methods could be improved, and the "internes" by participating in their efforts, both contributed to the development and carried its outcomes to other museums as they went on in their careers. I believe I am right in saying that most of them have remained in museum work and that several of them now hold important and influential posts.

That assistance of this type never bulked larger may have been due to the fact that these ideas were somewhat ahead of their time, with the result that opportunities for assistance were not too frequent. In the meantime, if my impression is not mistaken, these ideas have pretty much come to prevail in museum circles, with results that are visible even in such formerly staid institutions as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, or the Louvre in Paris. In this context, it is amusing to recall that the man at the time responsible for the training and placement of most museum personnel in the United States was reported as having remarked that the grant to the Brooklyn Museum provided training in what he termed "mere window dressing."

Jm

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* A tabulation of major grants during these years is appended.

APPENDIX

MAJOR ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION GRANTS FOR MUSEUM WORK, 1934-50

1935	- Brooklyn Museum - training of personnel in the use of new techniques in the visual presentation of museum objects.....	\$44,000
"	- New York Museum of Science & Industry - development of new methods of museum exhibition	50,000
1936	-	
1937	- Buffalo Museum of Science - training of museum personnel	50,000
1938	-	
1939	- Museum of Modern Art - general support, circulating exhibitions and publications	75,000
"	- New York Museum of Science & Industry - general support	25,000
1940	-	
1941	- Museum of Modern Art - current expenses	15,000
"	- Buffalo Museum of Science - advisory services and training of personnel in the Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro	12,500
1942	- Museum of Modern Art - work of its educational project	13,500
1943	-	
1944	- American Council of Learned Societies - study of the influence of art museums in American life (by Mr. Walter Pach).....	8,500
1945	-	
1946	- Ministry of Public Education, Guatemala - expenses of an expert to aid in development of the National Archaeological Museum	9,000
1947	-	
1948	-	
1949	-	
1950	-	

Total.... \$302,500