

The J Paul Getty Museum

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

When we met in March, I was asked to prepare a report for the Trustees suggesting the directions that the Museum might take in the future.

To help me in this, I have had discussions with my fellow Trustees, the staff of this museum, and senior officials of the major museums and universities in the Los Angeles area and elsewhere.

For reasons of brevity, I have thought it best to submit ~~a report which records my own conclusions without attempting~~ to present the many arguments that have been put to me nor the many conflicting views on how we should proceed in the future.

BACKGROUND

I have thought it right to consider what views Mr Getty would have had on our future directions. I think that the following might be taken to represent fairly Mr Getty's views:

he did not wish the Museum to be seen as any kind of personal monument to himself.

by our Trust Indenture, he endowed a "museum, art gallery and library." As far as I know, he did not elaborate anywhere, nor set any limits, on how these few words might be interpreted.

he was keen on serious scholarship and regarded popular appeal as desirable but secondary.

he favored the encouragement of young people, especially wishing to provide the context within which they could develop themselves by their own efforts.

he had a high regard for efficiency, prudence, and straightforward business dealings.

he was more interested in the views of the knowledgeable expert - even if his views were limited - rather than the broad visions of the idealist.

he was not sentimental and would expect us to develop and expand in the future without undue regard for the past. In particular, I do not think that he had any special attachment to the Ranch House and would expect us to use or remove it as we thought best.

PURPOSE

What, broadly, should be our aims for the future? By what achievements do we want the Getty Museum to be judged in the decades to come? I make two suggestions:

Excellence

We have no reason, let alone excuse, for not aiming for excellence in all that we do. We are in the unique position of having no prime concern for the number of museum visitors, or making a profit, or pleasing the authorities, or requiring the praise of the mandarins of the art world. We have no need for stunts or novelties, or instant popularity.

In fact, of course, this apparent freedom places an even greater responsibility on us to ensure that we inform ourselves as best we can on what we should do, obtain the best possible advice, remain coolheaded in these extraordinary circumstances. We have no divine way of always being right, but we must pursue excellence in all that we do.

Obligation to California

It seems certain that the work of the Museum will spread in time throughout America and the world. However, I suggest that our prime obligation should be to serve the cultural life of Southern California and Los Angeles in particular.

I regard this attitude as not only right and proper, when related to the history of the Museum, but also exceptionally fortunate. It is difficult to imagine an area where there is both a greater need as well as greater potential for service to the arts. This arises from the newness of cultural life here, the vastly growing population, the inventive and forward-looking character of the population - altogether an infinitely more fertile climate for development than would be found in the East Coast or in Europe. There it has all been done before; here (almost) anything is possible and much is needed.

DEVELOPMENT

How are we to develop if we are to pursue excellence and fulfill our role in the artistic life of Los Angeles and Southern California?

I suggest that we should give prime concern to (a) acquisitions, (b) the bringing of scholars to Los Angeles, and (c) the creation of an art institute from which these activities and others can be served.

Acquisitions

The starting point for all meaningful museum activities must be the availability of art objects. The finer the objects the greater the possibilities.

Even when the collections owned by the County Museum, Norton Simon, and us are put together, Los Angeles remains relatively poorly served with objects of first quality. This is not surprising. Los Angeles is a new city compared with the cities of the East Coast and Europe where collecting and the establishment of great museums has been growing for centuries.

We are late on the scene, and the acquiring of great works is increasingly difficult. But this should not deflect us from seeing this as a prime concern for which our future endowment makes us uniquely fortunate.

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We already have three superb collections. The Antiquities and Decorative Arts collections rate second or third in quality in the United States, and the Paintings collection, about tenth. It is truly remarkable that Mr Getty should have been able to assemble such outstanding collections.

However, in all three collections - as one would expect - there are gaps that need to be filled. There are artists who are not represented, artists whose work is not truly representative of them, and areas of artistic development which are missing or inadequate.

I suggest that the direction of our acquisitions policy over the next few years should concentrate on improving our existing collections.

Developing from this there are two areas where I suggest we should expand. One is into Ancient coins and minor Ancient arts. We already have a very significant collection which, with further work and acquisitions, would become both a splendid collection in itself and also a most valuable adjunct to the Antiquities collection.

The other field where I think we should develop is in the area of old master drawings, which could provide valuable material related to the Paintings collection as well as be of artistic interest in their own right.

Since our increased endowment was announced, I have been bombarded with suggestions of areas where we should begin to collect. I think that we should resist these and - for the time being at least - concentrate on what we have already started.

But I would like to mention two areas where we might develop in the future.

It is very surprising that in a city as new and vigorous as Los Angeles there is no museum which has concerned itself with collecting contemporary art (as opposed to holding temporary exhibitions). We would do a great service to Los Angeles if we developed in this area.

It is also surprising that in the birth place of the motion picture there have been only relatively uncoordinated attempts to create a film museum. I suggest that this would deserve serious consideration in the future.

Scholarship

Great objects alone are of limited use unless they are explained and worked on by scholars. To date Los Angeles has had limited success in attracting scholars of the highest rank. It is not just a matter of money - but ~~scholars of international repute require great collections,~~ good libraries, and scholars of comparable stature with whom they may work and associate.

It would be a great service to Los Angeles if we began to assemble a scholarly community. I suggest that we should aim at attracting about five within the next five years and at having brought about twenty scholars here within the next ten years. Whether they would be working within our institution, or on loan by us to another, would be a matter to decide later. But if this proposal is agreed to in principle, it would not be too early to start looking now as the caliber of scholar required will not be easy to find.

EXISTING MUSEUM AND RANCH PROPERTY

The existing museum has been successful far beyond what could have been expected three years ago. It has become an excellent and much-loved feature of Los Angeles life. It is most important that no future developments do anything to damage this.

It is impossible to imagine that the Museum and property could contain the vastly expanded activities that we can expect in the future. Our location at Malibu, with its various planning restraints, and the nature of the terrain would not permit anything but very minor expansion. Indeed, I fear that almost any expansion could seriously damage what is already a most attractive facility.

The present museum is best suited to the Antiquities collection. This will expand in the future, and I suggest that we should imagine that the Paintings and Decorative Arts collections should move to another facility. This would allow the Antiquities collection to grow, and we might consider including galleries that were concerned with Roman life and closely related to the reconstructed Villa dei Papiri.

At the moment I have no clear view on the future use of the Ranch House. We are using it for storage. We could house scholars - though it could be inconvenient for this. ~~We could arrange classrooms and study~~ collections. But it is likely that the problems of adaption will prove too difficult and that eventually we will decide that the house should be taken down and the site used for a new building.

However, there are two matters which I consider deserve attention now. Firstly, there is no proper survey of the whole Ranch property. There are a number of drawings, at different scales, and I suggest that these should be coordinated into one updated drawing. This would be essential whatever future planning might be done. Secondly, I am increasingly concerned by the traffic hazard present at the entrance from Pacific Coast Highway. Whatever our future plans, it is most unlikely that they would change our present problem, and I suggest that a study should be made now to see what improvements are possible.

A related matter is the large tract of land to the rear of the property that has been designated as an arboretum. At present this proposal is dormant due to inactivity on the part of the City, and I suggest that we should concern ourselves with this proposal and see what ways our property and the arboretum could be worked together. Two letters relating to this are included as an Appendix.

INSTITUTE FOR ART STUDIES

It is certain that we have to give thought to the creation of a new facility which would serve our expanded operations in the future.

We will have to think where this should be. The obvious options are to locate it near an existing museum, or near an existing university, or to find a site set well away from all existing development. In Los Angeles, distances mean less than elsewhere, but proximity to an existing facility would have obvious advantages.

We will have to think what form this new facility might take. I suspect that it is unlikely to be one major building but rather a complex of buildings, interconnecting and tailored to their particular use with consideration given to future expansion.

The elements that I imagine coming together in the new Institute include:

- Paintings collection
- Decorative Arts collection
- Conservation Laboratories
- Research Library
- Photo Library
- Publications Department
- Education Department
- Temporary Exhibitions
- Administrative Headquarters

The Paintings collection, transferred from Malibu, would be housed in new galleries which could be designed without the restraints that were imposed by incorporating them into the existing reconstructed Villa. There is a strong argument for thinking that we might wish to ask the County Museum and Norton Simon whether they would wish to join forces with us so that all three paintings collections could be shown together. This would create a collection which begins to equal the best collections in America.

The Decorative Arts collection would also be transferred from Malibu and rehoused. Again we might consider asking other collections to join us.

Conservation is an area where I think we should make a major development. It is an immensely valuable related activity to any museum. It would enable us to be of considerable service to other museums. The creation of expanded laboratories and related teaching facilities

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which do not exist anywhere else on the West Coast would be seen as a highly praiseworthy development at this time when so much emphasis is being put on conservation.

We already have a good, but limited, Research Library. We should consider expanding this greatly so that it would serve the essential needs of scholars and students.

The Photo Library that we have started is the only one on the West Coast and has already been much praised. Like the Research Library, it is an important resource for scholarship, and I suggest that we should expect to develop it considerably during the years to come.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to arrange for publication of scholarly works on art subjects where the demand may be small (but important) and the production costs high. It would be a very proper extension of our work in the future for us to concern ourselves with the publication of scholarly art books relating to both our own collections and to more general subjects.

If the expanded collection, study collections, libraries, conservation and other resources are to be fully exploited, it will be necessary that they are linked to an Education Department which would help to coordinate and to serve the needs of scholars and general public.

We would wish to arrange temporary exhibitions drawn from our own collection, and from outside. Such exhibitions could be of great importance in highlighting aspects of our own work and enabling us to show material which might not come to Los Angeles otherwise.

All these activities would need an Administrative Headquarters which should be housed within the Institute complex.

FURTHER PROPOSALS

During the preparation of this report, there have been countless proposals - many highly reasonable, many conflicting,

many foolish. It would be tedious to recount them all, but I would like to list some that I think will deserve our attention in the future.

We might like to favor collaboration with institutions located in areas where Mr Getty had special interest. For example, Tulsa where there are museums that would merit our assistance; Minneapolis where Mr Getty was born; and England where he spent the last years of his life.

One of the most significant ways in which we could bring art education into people's homes would be to sponsor one or more TV series - such as "Civilisation" made by the BBC with Kenneth Clark.

We should re-excavate the Villa de Papiri. There would be many problems in working in Italy and questions of what we would get out of it apart from scholarly credit. But it would be marvelous experience to have the original of our museum unearthed with the possibility of discovering important objects which we might be able to borrow if not to own.

To date we have done little to bring music to the Museum. I suggest that we should aim at developing a strong commitment to music both for its own sake and for the increased pleasure that it gives the public when visiting the Museum.

I would like us to become West Coast host to the Archives of American Art. This organization, administered by the Smithsonian Institution, collects archival material on all aspects of art (not just American), and it would be a most appropriate resource to complement the Research Library and Photo Library.

I suggest that our future education programs should not be restricted to the scholarly aspects of art but also to its preservation and care. There is a need for improved training for museum professionals such as Registrars.

Finally, one proposal which I do not suggest. It is that in keeping with the re-creation of a Roman villa, we should re-create Vesuvius on the hill behind the Museum and that at midday each day it would erupt, sending a light shower of (plastic) lava over the visitors below.

COLLABORATION

I think that it is important that we regard our increased endowment as good fortune. We cannot claim to have earned it. It will come to us simply because Mr Getty wished it so.

This leads me to believe strongly that we should do all that we can to collaborate with others to the benefit of the artistic and scholarly life of Los Angeles and then - spreading outwards - to Southern California and America and the world at large.

I suggest that there will be cases where our future work will best be done by us working out of the Institute suggested above. There will be other cases where our work will best be done through assisting in work that is already being done by others.

Overall we must be seen to be acting for the general good - complementing and assisting where most fruitful. There will always be the risk that our considerable financial power in the future will lead to suspicion about our activities. I suggest that we must go out of our way to demonstrate that it is our intention to serve the public at large as best we can.

Attached as an Appendix is a summary, prepared by Burton Fredericksen listing the various departments of Art History with whom we might expect to become concerned particularly in the future.

Forms of collaboration

There are countless ways in which we might collaborate with the museum and artistic community. Here are some examples:

Institute. The creation of the proposed institute would enable us to collaborate much more fully than we do at the moment with museums, universities, and other organizations by arranging special exhibitions, lectures, and study courses.

Conservation. Lack of facilities and funds means that most museums are unable to take adequate care of their collections. We should aim to assist in this. An example - taken from far afield - is the magnificent collection (the finest in private hands) of antiquities at Woburn Abbey in England. If we worked on items in their collection, we could ask that we retain them for a year or so for display in Los Angeles.

Loans to other museums. We would discuss with other museums - the Huntington Library and Art Gallery is a good example - what serious gaps they have in their collections, acquire works that would fill these gaps, and loan them to the museum concerned.

Joint ventures. We should continue to explore opportunities for us to acquire art objects in conjunction with other museums with the intention that the objects would be on view at our respective museums in turn. This would be a very positive form of collaboration.

Small museums. It will be natural for us to tend to collaborate with institutions of comparable size to us. But we should remember that there are many small museums, often working with small and dedicated staff, to whom a small amount of assistance could be of major significance.

Outposts. I would like us to develop "affiliations" with selected museums throughout the world. The choice would have to be made carefully and the nature of the affiliation defined with caution. But the purpose would be to develop meaningful links with sister institutions especially for the exchange of staff and loan exhibitions.

School of Art. There is always the danger that a museum becomes too rarified. I think that the Institute should be involved with an active art school. Whether this would best be done by us forming our own within the Insititute complex, or by collaborating with an existing school - such as Cal Arts or the Design Center - would require further thought. This would involve us in the actual creative problems of young people who in turn would benefit from the resources (collections, conservation, scholarship) that we would have available.

CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to arrive at the correct balance between reminding ourselves that the increased endowment is still some years away and moving actively to prepare plans for when it will come.

My opinion is that it is not too early for us to start making some definite plans and beginning to establish the picture of what we expect to be doing in, say, five years' time. Further, I think we should take now some initial steps to prepare ourselves for these developments.

Questions

In order to help us consider the future of the Museum, and possibly make some preliminary moves towards it, I have thought it helpful to list various questions that arise from this report.

First, some general questions:

what steps should we take to establish the extent to which we may operate outside California, outside America, or world wide?

what steps should we, or have we, taken to establish what activities we may undertake within the limits of our Trust Indenture?

do we wish to extend beyond the limits set by our Trust Indenture?

what policy do we wish to adopt over the next few years towards asking the Executors to disburse funds prior to the completion of probate?

Secondly, some questions which have a bearing on the way that we should operate and develop in the near future:

should we work on the premise that we expect to move the Paintings and Decorative Arts collections away from Malibu in due course?

is it agreed that conservation is likely to become an increasingly important activity in the future?

is it possible to establish what sum might be available for acquisitions during the coming year?

is it agreed that we should aim to encourage distinguished scholars to come to Los Angeles? And if so, would it be right for me to begin to consider who might be appropriate in anticipation that we might take on two scholars during 1978, possibly related to the university term beginning in the fall?

is it agreed that Ancient coins and minor Ancient arts is an area where we might develop in the future?

is it agreed that we would expect to collect old master drawings in the future?

should we explore the present position concerning the proposed arboretum to decide what benefit there would be to us in some form of collaboration?

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Finally, there were various additional staff appointments that I requested last year. These were not approved at that time. I believe that these are still important for the effective work of the Museum as it is now and are made even more essential if we are to begin to prepare ourselves for the future.

The appointments that I requested are:

Curatorial Assistants (3)
Head of Education
Editor
Graphic Designer

May I have the approval of the Board to make these appointments to be effective from 1 October?