



Albert Barnes's Foundation and the Place of Modernist Art within the Art Museum

America is . . . the country of the future, and its world-historical importance has yet to be revealed in the ages which lie ahead. . . . It is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical arsenal of old Europe.—G. W. F. HEGEL

In what envelope does modernist art arrive in the museum? It was not sufficient to say that modernism follows older art in strict chronological order. Many commentators argue that there is a break between earlier and later art. If they are correct, then chronological displays give a false unity to museum collections. Michel Foucault, for example, says that "*Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia* were perhaps the first 'museum' paintings, the first paintings in European art that were less a response to the achievement of Giorgione, Raphael, and Velasquez than an acknowledgement . . . of the new and substantial relationship of painting to itself, as a manifestation of the existence of museums and the particular reality and interdependence that paintings acquire in museums."¹ In the early 1860s, Michael Fried has plausibly claimed, "in order to secure the Frenchness of his own work—one of the chief imperatives of his enterprise at that time—[Manet] found himself compelled to establish connections of different degrees of explicitness between his paintings and the work of those painters of the past who seemed to him authentically French."² But notwithstanding these frequent allusions to earlier art, Manet does break with tradition. He painted for the museum—but Giorgione, Raphael, and Velázquez did not.

Philosophers distinguish between direct knowledge, what they call ac-

quaintance, and knowledge by description, which gives knowledge of history. As Bertrand Russell explains: "By a 'denoting phrase' I mean a phrase such as any one of the following: a man, some man, any man, every man, all men. . . . The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of such denoting phrases."³ For example, I know about Rome circa 1956 by acquaintance, for I was there. But because Denon died long before I was born, I know him only by description. Analogously I understand directly visual art belonging to a living tradition, in the way I know what has taken place in my lifetime. But I know what is more distant historically, by contrast, only through a bookish act of reconstruction. This distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and by description points to a difference in kind between contemporary art and older works of art in the museum. I know Sean Scully's aesthetic by acquaintance because I know him. But because Piero is historically distant, I may legitimately wonder if I correctly view his paintings.

If this argument is correct, then there is a difference in kind between contemporary and older art. In any event, as we have seen, the claim that there is one story of art is controversial. Ernst Gombrich titled his survey history *The Story of Art* because he found enough continuity in the development of European painting from Cimabue to Constable and impressionism to speak of one tradition. The curator John Elderfield extends this way of thinking to modernism: "I had a painting teacher whose own teacher was taught by Sickert who was taught by Degas who was taught by Ingres, and so it went on. Despite everything, I confess to clinging to the idea that it is all one art school."⁴ They believe that the story of European art presented in museums is a continuous narrative running from earliest times to the present. Matisse too took this view, as Jack Flam explains: "It would be wrong to think that there has been a break in the continuity of artistic progress from the early to the present-day painters. In abandoning tradition the artist would have but a fleeting success, and his name would soon be forgotten."⁵ There is but one significant tradition, the entire history of painting. "Matisse . . . sought . . . restoration (or reparation) of the narrative element of fictional art as part of his attempt to repair the break with the past that modernism seemed to have created," Elderfield writes.⁶ Even in the twentieth century a sufficiently

gifted artist could overcome the threatened break in the tradition. "To paint imperative pictures that gave to narration a commanding role . . . would be to rejoin modern art to the loftiest products of the Western tradition." If tradition be defined by narrative continuity, then what keeps it alive is such constant innovation.⁷

Narrative sentences are the hidden scaffolding holding together the public art museum. In the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for example, a decade ago you walked through an installation described by Clement Greenberg's canonical account of modernism: "I do not think it exaggerated to say that Pollock's 1946–1950 manner really took up Analytical Cubism from the point at which Picasso and Braque had left it when, in their collages of 1912 and 1913, they drew back from the utter abstractness for which Analytical Cubism seemed headed."⁸ But it took a long time for the Modern to adopt Greenberg's way of thinking. "Everyone learned a lot at the museum," he wrote in 1957, "but you did not feel at home in it. [In the 1930s] Alfred Barr was . . . betting on a return to 'nature,' and a request of the American Abstract Artists to hold one of their annuals in the Museum was turned down with the intimation that they were following what had become a blind alley."⁹ Barr's exhibition catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936), for example, argued that "an 'abstract' painting is really a most positively concrete painting since it confines the attention to its immediate, sensuous, physical surface far more than does the canvas of a sunset or a portrait."¹⁰ Unlike Greenberg's account, that analysis hardly prepared you to appreciate Jackson Pollock. And in 1946 Barr claimed that Peter Blume's minor *The Eternal City* anticipated *Guernica*.¹¹ Compared with the single-minded Greenberg, Barr, the most influential American curator of modernism, made some dubious claims and sometimes had shaky taste.¹²

Both Barr and Greenberg played an important role in establishing a place for modernist art in the museum. Without Barr's curatorial skills and Greenberg's theorizing, the history of American art would be very different. Together they established ways of thinking that gave essential support to the Abstract Expressionists and their successors. But before Greenberg published criticism or the Museum of Modern Art was created, Albert Barnes was a major champion of modern art. Bernard Berenson and Ernest Fenollosa were gifted writers who influenced museums through collaborations with collectors. Barnes, the first American

to create a great permanent modernist collection, also wrote books on Cézanne, Matisse, and Renoir.¹³ Both curator and art writer, he published a treatise on aesthetics, *The Art in Painting*, and *The French Primitives and Their Forms: From Their Origin to the End of the Fifteenth Century*, organized a journal and worked out an original conception of the modernist museum.¹⁴

A provincial nouveau riche Philadelphian who began by collecting William Glackens, Barnes had the energy and intelligence to become a great champion of Soutine. His collection focused on impressionism, early Picasso and Matisse—after that period, he didn't respond to the best new art. "According to Barnes, Picasso in his Cubist days was pulling people's legs," Pierre Cabanne writes.¹⁵ Fascinated by African American culture, in 1925 Barnes said, "The white man in the mass cannot compete with the Negro in spiritual endowment."¹⁶ He supported some African American painters and left his collection to a black university.¹⁷ You need but compare Barnes's foundation to the sadly eclectic collection assembled by committees from the Carnegie International exhibitions in Pittsburgh to see what a good eye he had. In the 1920s, the Carnegie First-Class Prize winners were Abbott Thayer, Ernest Lawson, George Bellows, Arthur Davies, Augustus John, Henri Eugène Le Sidaner, Ferruccio Ferrazzi, and Felice Carena; and, also, I admit, Matisse and André Derain.¹⁸ (A couple of years later, Pittsburgh bought a minor Picasso.) The Carnegie was ambitious, looked to Europe, and had money. But when the self-educated Barnes was assembling a monument to his taste, these committees chose "names" of the day.

By all accounts Barnes was a very difficult, extremely willful man, sociable only on his own terms. Like his judgments of taste, his writing is dogmatic—Barnes mentions other critics only to dismiss their claims. Had he been less independent, he would not have assembled so spectacular a collection. But when Matisse visited Merion, he found Barnes's installations infinitely preferable to the hangings of the more respectable Philadelphia collectors. Russell reports,

Quite apart from the very high quality of much that was on show, he was delighted by the candor and the straightforwardness with which it was installed. . . . Matisse even liked the promiscuity with which great works of art were shown out of context and in the company with objects that

differed from them both in kind and in date. This was . . . "the only sane place" for the display of art that Matisse had as yet seen in America.¹⁹

And Barnes was the only collector anywhere who had the vision to commission a mural by Matisse, and the skill and determination (and money) to persuade the artist to execute such a commission. When, in the course of that difficult project, Matisse described Barnes as like himself, only cruder, he revealed something important about his champion.

Ruthless in his pursuit of the best, unlike most collectors Barnes also had a serious interest in progressive politics. The contention of his foundation, he wrote, "has been that art is no trivial matter, no . . . upholstery for the houses of the wealthy, but a source of insight into the world, for which there is and can be no substitute, and in which all persons who have the necessary insight may share."²⁰ Barnes used his collection for educational purposes. And he took a strong stand on one great issue of the day: "[As] knowledge of the great art achievements of the Negro becomes more generally diffused there is every reason to look for an abatement of both the superciliousness on the part of the white race and of the unhappy sense of inferiority in the Negro himself, which have been detrimental to the true welfare of both races."²¹ In his dedication address at the foundation, John Dewey said: "I know of no more significant, symbolic contribution than that which the members of this institute have made to the solution of what sometimes seems to be not merely a perplexing but a hopeless problem—that of race relations."²² Barnes believed that his collection could serve this goal.

Like Roger Fry, whom he denounced in his journal, Barnes was interested in African art. He hired Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro to write *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, a book about sculpture from his collection. They wrote, "If negro sculpture is to be enjoyed at all, it will probably be through its plastic effects. In other ways it is apt to be unmeaning or even disagreeable to civilized people. But in shapes and designs of line, plane and mass, it has achieved a variety of striking effects that few if any other types of sculpture have equaled."²³ Other writers were discovering this art. Fry, for example, said: "Negro art aims at expressing one thing only, the vital essence of man, that energy of the inner life which manifests itself in certain forms and rhythms. Negro art is the most purely spiritual art we know of. . . . It is the expression of an intensely animated

religion which conceives of everything as due to the action of spirits."²⁴ Kermode writes that such art writers identified art "as having 'a life of its own,' supplying its own energy, and possessing no detachable meanings . . . containing within itself all that is relevant to itself."²⁵

Like Fry, Barnes was a formalist. That too shows his period style. "Unlike the ordinary man, whose feelings spur him to produce practical changes in the things he sees, the artist expends his energy in sharpening his vision, refining and deepening his perceptions, discovering a richer plastic and human significance in the object of his interest."²⁶ He thought that form and its abstraction from life are of central importance, Mullen writes: "In actual life 'form' is 'the characteristic impression left in the mind by experience' and such 'forms' are possessed by every human being. They are the ideas we store in our mind of objects or situations after they have become meaningful for us."²⁷ Barnes makes few references to social history, is not much interested in the subjects of art, and offers no account of historical development.

Barr's 1926 review of Barnes's *The Art in Painting* begins on a very positive note: "This is an important book because it presents a systematic and confident statement of what is central in the 'modern' attitude toward painting. Its five hundred pages are the expression of an energetic critic, of an experimenter in the education of art-appreciation, and of the owner of the finest collection of modern paintings in America."²⁸ But then the complaints begin. Barr notes historical errors which "are too frequent to catalogue" and—most damagingly—Barnes's taste.²⁹ Formalism, Barr argues, leads Barnes to mistakenly find very similar designs in "an Entombment by Titian and a still-life by Cézanne."³⁰ The price of emphasis upon cultural unity is a refusal to acknowledge any differences between old master and modernist art. Greenberg, who also was a formalist, provided a very different account of modernism: "Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art; Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting . . . were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Under Modernism these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly."³¹ He argued that modernism arises dialectically from old master art. In making explicit the concerns that the old masters left implicit, the modernists extend tradition. A good Hegelian, Green-

berg sees the story of art as a history of continuities. Like his narrative sentence linking cubism and Abstract Expressionism, this influential analysis of the relationship of modernist to old master art informs museums. Barnes's simpler formalism, by contrast, inspired historical displays projecting a modernist aesthetic onto the old masters. In his foundation old and new art from Africa and Europe enters into a dialogue on equal terms. There are no names or titles in this aesthetic hanging. And high art is alongside humble decorative objects.³²

Matisse's "Notes of a Painter" (1908) explains how he responded to old master frescoes: "A work of art must carry within itself its complete significance and impose that upon the beholder even before he recognizes the subject matter. When I see the Giotto frescoes at Padua I do not trouble myself to recognize which scene of the life of Christ I have before me, but I immediately understand the feeling that emerges from it, for it is in the lines, the composition, the color. The title will only serve to confirm my impression."³³ This formalist way of viewing is exemplified by the Barnes Foundation. "Here there is no hidden meaning, no reference to, nor hint of, anything else. . . . Here appearance is everything," Roberto Calasso describes the implications of such a style of visual thinking.³⁴ Matisse's claim that the subject of sacred Christian works could be transparently presented formally invokes a modernist ideal.³⁵ I do not believe that Giotto would recognize this description of his fresco. Matisse goes on to make his famous statement about dreaming of "an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter." This is an accurate description of his *Merion Dance Mural* (1932–33). Before you identify the scene, you understand the feeling emerging from the lines, composition, and color.³⁶

Barnes's foundation is both forward and backward looking. He believed modernism created aesthetic harmony: "Variety in color, which is exemplified in the highest degree in Giorgione and Renoir, depends for its aesthetic effect on a controlling sense of harmony: without that variety becomes clash and chaos. . . . In Matisse, colors which taken in isolation might seem harsh, crude and displeasing merge into an ensemble which is extremely rich."³⁷ But he also looked back to the community life associated with Renaissance frescoes and to churches like the Orvieto Duomo (1290), described here by John White: "In walking down the nave, each column, almost six feet in diameter, is so sited as to overlap

the beginning of the corresponding apse. The column being closer to the eye, the apparent diameters of the two forms almost coincide, so that the convex curve runs smoothly on into its concave counterpart."³⁸ And his foundation anticipates installation art, fashionable in the 1980s when Barbara Kruger, Robert Gober, and Paul McCarthy created room-filling assemblages of objects. "Something could be contributed by the spectator within the structure established by the artist. . . . The visitors helped to create the work, to complete it. The situation provided an active experience for the viewer."³⁹ Giotto, Barnes says, is said to mark "the beginning of the Florentine tradition. . . . His use of perspective opened up a world of values possible only by the ingenious utilization of deep space; his modeling added lifelike three-dimensional qualities to figures and endowed them with conviction; he replaced the over-decorative static Byzantine linear pattern of light in folds of draperies by a few simple folds preponderantly vertical."⁴⁰ Like the Orvieto architect and installation artists, Barnes created a total work of visual art (fig. 17).

Barnes, like Matisse, was a great believer in the unity of artistic tradition. "He has always maintained that the moderns are directly in the great tradition, and he is after certain Old Masters through whom he can trace the continuity of that tradition," A. H. Shaw explains.⁴¹ In a 1943 catalogue essay on Chinese painting, for example, Barnes claims: "Human nature is the same always and everywhere. In every age and every culture human beings have the same basic needs, encounter the same world and the same problems, expend time and effort in seeking the same satisfaction. . . . To recognize essential humanity . . . we must look beneath the surface, disregard the adventitious, grasp the essential."⁴² "All great artists work in a tradition," he wrote, for "a tradition is simply a way of seeing that has been shared."⁴³ That also was Matisse's view. Believing that Giotto and the other old masters were doing the same thing as he was, with different subjects and a different context, late in life he copied their paintings in his style.

Many people think that way of thinking mistaken. The idea that modernism involves a break with the traditions of visual art has become a cliché. Nochlin describes "that sense of social, psychological, even metaphysical fragmentation that so seems to mark modern experience—a loss of wholeness, a shattering of cocoon or disintegration of permanent value that is so universally felt in the nineteenth century as to be often iden-



17. Main Gallery, Barnes Foundation. © 2002 The Barnes Foundation.

tified with modernity itself.”⁴⁴ Barnett Newman, for example, criticized “those critics . . . who have made careers for themselves as ‘friends of modern art’ by broadcasting the sophism that the values of modern art were a continuation of the great tradition of European painting begun in the Renaissance. Impelled, perhaps, by the Englishman’s innate aversion to revolution, these critics devoted themselves to talking everybody out of its revolutionary character.”⁴⁵ He certainly thought that his art broke with tradition. More recently Hans Belting has taken a similar view: “Traditional and modern art are certainly not to be thought of as a single entity. Rather, they should become the object of questions which, by virtue of the retrospective view possible today, admit them both as historical phenomena.”⁴⁶ If Newman and Belting are right, then it is unclear what place modernism has in the museum narrative.

When Gardner created her museum, she could rely on established taste in old masters and a well-developed tradition of theorizing about visual art. Barnes, by contrast, had to develop his museum and theory of modernism almost from scratch. Gardner created a first-rate if chaotic collection. Barnes did something much more interesting—he designed an installation that exemplified his theory of art. One good way to get a sense for his intelligence is to compare a once distinguished, now forgotten rival. After discussing van Gogh, Gauguin, and the French avant-garde, Thomas Craven’s *Modern Art: The Men, the Movements, the Meaning* (1934) devotes dismissive chapters to Matisse and Picasso. Quoting Barnes’s account of *The Joy of Life*, Craven then describes the painting as “A large and vacant picture built around a naked triangle. . . . In the center of the triangle is a cluster of leaping foetuses; on the right side, smudges and some irregular patches attached to stems—presumably trees. . . . The design . . . in its present dimensions . . . is a vapid tour de force.”⁴⁷ Matisse, he complains, is “opposed to any participation in the real world.” (Craven championed George Grosz and American regionalism.) By contrast, Barnes expresses the recent consensus when he writes: “Matisse is a very great artist, a man of keen sensitiveness, vigorous intelligence, and enormous erudition . . . from his fecund imagination have come a wealth of plastic achievements unequalled by those of any other painter of his generation.”⁴⁸ And so it is surprising to find that when there is so much interest in Matisse, Barnes remains unread.⁴⁹

The dedication of the most famous American treatise on aesthetics

reads, "To Albert C. Barnes, in gratitude." In the preface of *Art as Experience*, after thanking Meyer Schapiro, John Dewey says that "my greatest indebtedness is to Dr. A. C. Barnes. . . . I have had the benefit of conversations with him through a period of years, many of which occurred in the presence of the unrivaled collection of pictures he has assembled. . . . I should be glad to think of this volume as one phase of the widespread influence the Foundation is exercising."⁵⁰ This is not merely a polite reference to a friend (and financial supporter). Dewey repeatedly mentions Barnes's publications, and Barnes, in turn, dedicated *The Art in Painting* to "John Dewey, whose conceptions of experience, of method, of education, inspired the work of which this book is a part."⁵¹ Elsewhere he wrote: "It is universally acknowledged that, throughout his career, Dewey's supreme interest has been in the operation of intelligence to free human powers and enrich human experience. . . . My topic . . . is the application of this method to aesthetics."⁵² In 1926, Barnes and Dewey looked at art together in Madrid, Paris, and Vienna.

Richard Rorty described Dewey as "just the philosopher one might want to read if one were turning from Kant to Hegel, from a 'metaphysics of experience' to a study of cultural development."⁵³ But the recent revival of interest in Dewey has not led art historians to look at Barnes. "Pictures can express every object and situation," Dewey wrote, "capable of presentation as a scene."⁵⁴ Philosophers of art take Dewey very seriously but have almost nothing to say about Barnes.⁵⁵ The same is true of Dewey's biographers, who tend to be oddly apologetic about this relationship. For example, Steven Rockefeller writes, "Barnes had a reputation for being an extraordinarily difficult personality who frequently became angry, arbitrary, and abusive in his dealings with people. However, he had great respect for Dewey who seemed to be the only person who could restrain him and bring him to reason."⁵⁶ That is not correct. Barnes did have other loyal friends and collaborators. Sometimes he is dismissed entirely by recent commentators on Dewey. Alan Ryan wonders, "It is . . . strange that Dewey, who was in thought and deed a democrat through and through, could have tolerated the autocratic, changeable, and wildly aggressive Barnes. However, Dewey had a taste for the company of oddballs of all sorts, and . . . a policy of giving possible charlatans the benefit of the doubt."⁵⁷ That too is misleading. Barnes, though arrogant and autocratic, was no charlatan. Even Barnes's collection, his

obvious great achievement, has its detractors, among them Ryan: "Barnes had his paintings arranged in a very particular, not to say very unorthodox fashion. They are displayed so as to produce a whole wall of color and mood. . . . The collection is wonderfully disconcerting, not least because of the near invisibility of some wonderful things and the mind-boggling juxtapositions that Barnes's wall arrangement sometimes produces."⁵⁸ In fact, Barnes recreated in a personal way the hanging style of premodern art collections.

Barnes's and Dewey's ideas about art are similar enough that when composing this account, turning back and forth from *Art as Experience* to *The Art in Painting*, often I found myself momentarily uncertain which author I was reading. Barnes's aesthetic is dated, but in historical context he, like Heinrich Wölfflin and Roger Fry, secularized old master Christian art by means of formal analysis. Dewey's goal, "to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doing, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience," also speaks to this concern.⁵⁹ And when he goes on to note that we give "domestic utensils" and similar utilitarian things "places of honor in our art museums," it is natural to recall that Barnes placed craft implements around paintings in his museum.⁶⁰ For Barnes, Ryan writes, "from an aesthetic point of view, a painting was to be engaged with as an experienced object, not primarily to be thought about as a social or historical product."⁶¹ Dewey's desire to eliminate the usual barriers between "art" and "life," which made him so critical of traditional art museums, shows his sympathy with the physical arrangement of Barnes's foundation: "Our present museums and galleries to which works of fine art are removed and stored illustrate some of the causes that have operated to segregate art instead of finding it an attendant of temple, forum, and other forms of associated life."⁶² He rejects the idea that only experts can respond intelligently to art. "The dream of America is community, is communication, is art—the American dream is an exacted relationship."⁶³ Dewey sought "a conception of fine art that sets out from its connection with discovered qualities of ordinary experience."⁶⁴ Both his aesthetic and his politics gave him reason to find Barnes an invaluable ally.

A 1913 photograph of the apartment of Leo and Gertrude Stein, 27 Rue de Fleurus, Paris, shows Henri Matisse's *The Joy of Life* (1905–6).⁶⁵ The

room is densely hung with paintings by Picasso, Matisse, and Felix Valotton, and three Cézanne watercolors. In 1914 Leo and Gertrude Stein divided their collection and Leo took *The Joy of Life*. After being resold it was purchased by Barnes. Today the painting is in Merion, where, Pierre Schneider reports, "it seems destined to remain even more deeply hidden away than the rest of the extraordinary collection in the Barnes Foundation, for it has been relegated to a passageway, or rather a dark and narrow stairwell, where it is almost impossible to view it properly."⁶⁶ This is hardly a subtle point. *The Joy of Life* is in the worst viewing position of any picture in the museum. Coming up the stairs, as you turn up to see it, the people descending block your view. Then when you ascend to look down on it from the top of the stairs on the second floor, you must look across from a distance in awkward lighting. Every detail in a major painting is significant because an artist seeks to control what he makes. Most museums grow by accretion, depending on a succession of curators. But the foundation is a relatively small collection organized solely by its creator. And so it is reasonable to ask whether the odd position of *The Joy of Life* is intentional.

Barnes was determined to alienate the art world and all too effectively succeeded. Given that he was impossibly difficult, it seems appropriate that he perversely placed *The Joy of Life* in an impossible viewing position. For many years that was my unthinking supposition. But upon reflection, this presupposition seems unconvincing. Barnes took great care with his installation. The lighting and the relationships of paintings and works on paper are very nicely calculated. When Barnes cannot sleep, a reporter wrote in 1928, "he puts on his dressing gown . . . and in the gallery he studies his pictures and sometimes spends hours arranging one to suit his taste."⁶⁷ This, surely, is how we would expect an obsessive connoisseur to behave. And so it cannot be mere happenstance that *The Joy of Life* is on the stairs, as if Barnes had just been too lazy to find some more suitable setting.

Until recently *The Joy of Life* was available only in black and white reproductions. Had the painting been more accessible, perhaps it would have become more familiar to art historians. As it is the picture has a certain mystique. Whatever art writers say about its sources, *The Joy of Life* remains extremely hard to understand.⁶⁸ Matisse's slightly later, well-known masterworks unpack this composition, which is too rich to be

fully satisfying. When acquired by Barnes in 1927, it was hung downstairs. But by the time Matisse visited the foundation in 1930 it was already on the stairwell.⁶⁹ The painting must therefore have moved to this awkward site just before Matisse arrived. Barnes knew that *The Joy of Life* was a masterpiece, so why did he put it there? To answer that question, we must look back to Matisse's most important earlier installation.

In 1910 the Russian collector Sergey Shchukin hired Matisse to make three paintings for his house. Matisse described his plan:

I have to decorate a staircase. It has three floors. I imagine a visitor coming in from the outside. There is the first floor. One must summon up energy, give a feeling of lightness. My first panel represents the dance, that whirling round on top of the hill. On the second floor one is not within the house; in its silence I see a scene of music with engrossed participants; finally the third floor is completely calm and I paint a scene of repose.⁷⁰

Unfortunately he made a very serious miscalculation—Shchukin's house had only two floors. *The Dance*, painted for the first floor, and *Music*, for the second, remain in the Hermitage. Matisse radically repainted the picture originally intended for the third floor. Now retitled *Bathers by the Stream*, it is in the Art Institute of Chicago, but a work on paper preserves the original image intended for the third floor.⁷¹ Anticipating this installation, *The Joy of Life* also brings together three distinct spaces. In the center, at the far distance, is the ring of dancers; in the middle layer, lovers and a musician; and at the front, reclining figures. For Shchukin that richly condensed conception has in effect been unpacked into three pictures. Barnes could not have envisaged the intended arrangement of the three panels. But he was aware that Matisse painted Arcadian scenes. And so he knew enough to move *The Joy of Life* from downstairs to its present position.⁷²

Imagine that Moscow installation constructed as Matisse planned. Walking up that imaginary three-story staircase, you would begin on the ground floor looking at the top of the hill shown in *The Dance*. Going up one floor, you would seem to come down the represented hill, seeing in *Music* the edge of the hill near the top of the painting. And finally as you come to the top of the stairs, you would seem to arrive at the bottom of that hill. As you physically moved upward, you would seem to be descending the depicted hill. Showing an ideal place far apart from

our conflict-filled life, Matisse reveals utopia by means of the content of his images. This is not just an ideal place, but somewhere far from our world. In the subtle Shchukin installation, the illusionistic picture spaces are visible from, but far away from our world. "How could we be walking *up* when the successive images appear as if we were moving *down* a hill?" it asks.⁷³ We must be looking into another world!

Picasso's and Braque's cubism was much imitated, but Matisse's concern with utopian space was not the source for ongoing modernist tradition. And so we may better understand his ways of thinking by scrutiny of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, which also links real and fictional worlds. That novel contrasts so-called reality, where the commentator Charles Kinbote lives and writes, with the deliberately unreal world created by the poet John Shade. Reality and illusion—the poem and commentary—are related. Things, people and also literary texts move from one world, reality, to another fictional place. And if you follow the notes, you learn that in Arcadia the crown jewels are hidden, as Kinbote's commentary says, "in a totally different—and quite unexpected—corner of Zembla," that is reality.⁷⁴ The solution of that literary puzzle helps explain Matisse's similar way of thinking. Just as reality and fiction are subtly linked in *Pale Fire*, so too in Matisse's Shchukin installation the real stairs that you climb and the imaginary hill depicted in the painting are related. (How very Nabokovian that this installation never existed.) Nabokov and Matisse think about Arcadia in similar ways because they are interested in the logical relationship between appearance and reality. There is no causal connection between their utopias, but solving the puzzle in *Pale Fire* helps you understand Matisse's installation.⁷⁵

Dewey discusses *The Joy of Life* (fig. 18) in a way that supports my analysis. The experience that is its source, he remarks, "is highly imaginative; no such scene ever occurred. It is an example as favorable to the dreamlike theory of art as can be found. But. . . to become the matter of a work, it had to be conceived in terms of color as a medium of expression; the floating image and feeling of a dance had to be translated into the rhythms of space, line, and distributions of light and colors."⁷⁶ And Barnes devotes a four-page formal analysis to *The Joy of Life*. "The outstanding feature . . . is an all-pervasive feeling of color-movement. This movement and pattern are appropriate to the subject-matter—an Arcadian scene of nudes dancing, playing music and reclining at ease in



18. Henri Matisse, *The Joy of Life*, no. 719.
 Photograph © 1992 The Barnes Foundation.

a landscape." After contrasting the central triangle, the yellow ground with the dancers and reclining nudes with the triangles above at left and right, he notes that "taken together these two enframing triangles seem like an open stage-curtain hanging from the top of the picture and drawn aside to reveal a vista of landscape." In this "decorative color-pattern," "background, middle ground and foreground are united on equal terms to yield a total effect not unlike that of a poster or brightly-patterned banner."⁷⁷

Once Barnes intuited Matisse's interest in Arcadian scenes, he acknowledged this discovery by installing *The Joy of Life* in its seemingly awkward position. How pleased Matisse must have been to see that Barnes had placed his picture on the stairs! Barnes does not say this. But his installation does. Either he moved *The Joy of Life* because he intuited something like my analysis, or its peculiar permanent positioning in his very meticulously planned museum was merely an afterthought. When

you go up the stairs past *The Joy of Life*, then on the second floor you look across to the top of that mural. In the installation for Shchukin, *The Joy of Life* is unpacked. *Dance Mural* continues that unpacking one stage further. In *The Joy of Life* and *The Dance*, the dancers move in a closed circle. In his mural Matisse focuses close in on that line of figures. The dancers in *The Joy of Life* are in the distance; in the *Mural*, the much larger dancers remain distant. Either you view them looking up from the floor of the hall or, after walking up the stairwell, you see them at your own level across the open space.

In the 1930s, Marxists and other politically conscious critics thought that easel painting was obsolete.⁷⁸ And so it was natural for Barnes to invite Matisse to Merion to commission a mural. Compared with the great Matisses installed nearby, *The Dance* is minor.⁷⁹ Who, turning to see *The Joy of Life*, would compare *The Dance* with that masterpiece? Disappointed by the mural, Barnes did not describe his difficulties with Matisse in his book on the artist.⁸⁰ He does tactfully explain why he gave the artist this commission, and how he evaluated it: "Matisse . . . is by temperament primarily interested in the decorative aspects of things. . . . This bent and practice involves a sacrifice of the more profound interpretative values, both human and plastic, characteristic of the greatest artists."⁸¹ After offering substantial criticism, Barnes describes Matisse as "far and away the foremost painter of the day. . . . a very great artist, a man of keen sensitiveness, vigorous intelligence, and enormous erudition; he is intensely alive and adventurous."⁸² Given their recent difficulties, this seems high praise indeed. In 1934 he told Matisse that he was coming to appreciate the mural more. Barnes deserves credit both for holding his temper and for his good judgment. It must have been awkward to live with a painting that he did not entirely admire and which, unlike his others, could not be moved.

Barnes had created some of these problems. He refused to remove the two large paintings by Matisse and a Picasso on the wall underneath, take off the sculpted frieze directly under the mural, or replace the frosted glass above the doors with clear glass, so that the outdoor greenery could be visible.⁸³ Still Matisse thought his mural a great success, saying "It is of a splendor that one cannot imagine until one sees it."⁸⁴ What he desired, his drawings show, was that the mural structure the large two-story gallery space. That requires an essentially blank background, because the

viewer must not be distracted. Looking at the mural reproduced in isolation from the present context or as displayed when the Barnes foundation collection toured, is misleading. Matisse wanted that his dancers seem to go across the edges of the mural, moving freely over the walls, creating a decorative effect. But because of an error in reading the blueprint, he had to redo this composition completely. John O'Brian writes, "The design Barnes desired seem to him to accord with his Giottesque ideals. In it, as in *Le bonheur de vivre*, the circling dancers were joined to one another in a collective activity; they were participating in a notion of community, a concept central to Barnes's educational ideas. The final design eschews these qualities."⁸⁵ The need to rework the original composition created insuperable problems.

Matisse had hesitated to undertake this commission, feeling that his talent was not suited to such site-specific mural art. He was motivated, in large part by financial necessity. (Like Barnes, Matisse was a self-made man who could be tight.)⁸⁶ He tried, and failed, to match the Giotto in Padua. A Renaissance painter collaborated with his patrons. That it was difficult for Matisse to create such a relationship even with so initially sympathetic and knowledgeable a collector as Barnes shows how problematic was this attempt to continue tradition.⁸⁷ But Matisse learned from the unhappy experience. The Vence chapel, planned in exhausting detail, partly paid for by the artist, was more successful because Matisse's visual conception was uncompromised. When working on that project, Matisse reflected back on the experience at Merion. "That old cow Barnes how he tormented me!"⁸⁸

These problems with *The Dance* point to larger difficulties with the foundation. Barnes was passionately interested in education, but in the end he was not the right person to run a school. He wrote extensively about art, but not in a way that encouraged intellectual intercourse. And his commission for Matisse yielded limited results because the two men were not effective collaborators. In the end, Barnes's foundation had surprisingly little effect upon either the development of museums or American art. It was Barr's Museum of Modern Art that provided the much-emulated model. Barnes's hanging now seems old-fashioned, a throwback to the aesthetic hangings of premodern private collections. And when Greenberg's dialectical theory of modernism became the position everyone read and rejected, no attention was paid to Barnes's writ-

ings.⁸⁹ When the Philadelphia establishment turned against him, he, in return, restricted admission to his collection. Believing that great art belongs to the public, we find Barnes's possessive attitude off-putting. In a sad but not entirely unpredictable way, Barnes's aggressive refusal to engage in dialogue has had posthumous consequences. The foundation is about to be dismantled and moved to Philadelphia. This is unfortunate since the destruction of Barnes's museum is unnecessary, for all that is required for its preservation is some practical way to accommodate visitors.

Were the Gardner Museum folding or the Frick being absorbed by the Metropolitan, distinguished defenders of these institutions would come forward. Were a real estate developer destroying the Vence chapel, then art historians would protest. But because Barnes so effectively alienated the art world, his institution has few champions. There is little interest in preserving his installation. Barnes professed a paternalist interest in black culture, but willing his precious collection to a small, intellectually provincial African American university with no history of interest in visual art effectively guaranteed that his legacy would not be adequately protected. Might this history have been different? Probably not, for looking back the problems inherent in Barnes's way of thinking are obvious. Museums had long organized their old art in historical hangings, so when they added modernist painting and sculpture, naturally it was displayed in the same way. Like Gardner's museum, another private collection opened to the public, his foundation is a throwback. Barnes's books are no longer read, but his collection remains fascinating. Because he was so aggressive, the fate of his museum is not entirely surprising. He loved art but showed this love in ways that were unhappily possessive. Unwilling to enter into dialogue, he has not inspired commentators to evaluate his achievement. How odd that a man who so often professed to believe in tradition was so aggressively self-destructive. For we historians of museums, failures can be as revealing as the successes.⁹⁰

107. Ibid., 1:150.
108. Because academic art history has lost sight of these Hegelian themes, recent historians of art have mostly not taken up this concern.
109. Some American museums, the Metropolitan, for example, hang their Chinese art in chronological order. But others such as the Cleveland Museum of Art do not.
110. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, chapter 7, 143.
111. See Masheck, "Dow's 'Way' to Modernity for Everybody."
112. Danto, *Connections to the World*, 14.
113. Danto, *Philosophizing Art*, 166.
114. Danto, *Mysticism and Morality*, xvi–xvii.
115. Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art*, 412.
116. Lee, *Past, Present, East and West*, 105–6.
117. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, 191–92.
118. Chisolm, *Fenollosa*, 127.
119. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, 189.
120. Benjamin Rowland offers suggestive pairings in *Art in East and West*.
121. Clunas, *Art in China*, 9.
122. See Quine, *Word and Object*, chapter 2.
123. Cahill, "Approaches to Chinese Painting," 5.

Chapter 8: Albert Barnes's Foundation

1. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 92.
2. Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 85.
3. B. Russell, *Logic and Knowledge*, 41. For commentary, see Pears, *Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy*, chapter 6.
4. See Carrier, "The Bohen Series on Critical Discourse," 58.
5. Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 73.
6. Elderfield, *The Drawings of Henri Matisse*, 55.
7. On Matisse's uses of tradition, see Wright, *Identity Trouble*.
8. Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 218.
9. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 20.
10. Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, 11.
11. Barr, *What Is Modern Painting*, 21.
12. Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*
13. He wrote in collaboration with Violette de Mazia, but since it is impossible to identify her independent role and Barnes was her employer, I will speak of Barnes's books.
14. Thomas Munro writes, "his taste is attracted chiefly by what is conven-

tional, weak and sentimental" ("The Aesthetics of Bernhard Berenson," 53). From our present perspective, Barnes's analysis (and his taste) seems similar to Fry's. Buermeyer speaks of "how grave are the consequences of error in fundamental aesthetic and psychological principles" ("The Aesthetics of Roger Fry," 287).

15. Cabanne, *The Great Collectors*, 173.

16. Barnes, "Negro Art and America."

17. See C. Clark, "African Art."

18. See V. Clark, *International Encounters*.

19. Russell, *Matisse*, 61. Russell, who titles this chapter "Dr. Barnes: Patron or Pest?" writes in support of the family, using the Pierre Matisse Archives.

20. Dewey and Barnes, *Art and Education*, vi.

21. Barnes, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, 8. According to Barnes, Africans are closer to nature than white Americans. But he also generously proposes that whites should acknowledge the artistic gifts of blacks.

22. Dewey, "Dedication Address," 5.

23. Guillaume and Munro, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, 32.

24. Fry, *Last Lectures*, 76.

25. Kermode, *Romantic Image*, 107.

26. Barnes and de Mazia, *The Art of Renoir*, 6.

27. Mullen, *An Approach to Art*, 16. Mullen was an early participant in Barnes's educational program; see Greenfeld, *The Devil and Dr. Barnes*, 56.

28. Barr, "Plastic Values," 948.

29. Barr complains about Barnes's championing of Soutine, which was one of the great triumphs of the collector's taste.

30. Ibid.

31. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 86.

32. The old master paintings in his collection are not of the same quality as his modernist masterpieces.

33. Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 41–42.

34. Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, 117.

35. Matisse felt so close to the old masters that he copied Veronese's *The Rape of Europe* in 1928 and in 1935 and 1938 did studies after Antonio del Pollaiuolo. See Schneider, *Henri Matisse*.

36. The fullest account is Flam, *Matisse: The Dance*. See also Flam, *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation*, 274–91.

37. Barnes and de Mazia, *The French Primitives and Their Forms*, 7.

38. J. White, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 50.

39. Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, 14. As Reiss notes, although many installation artists were hostile to museums, soon enough their art was incorporated into these institutions.

40. Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 115.
41. Shaw, "Profiles," 34.
42. Barnes, *Ancient Chinese and Modern European Paintings*, n.p.
43. Barnes and de Mazia, *The Art of Henri Matisse*, 1.
44. Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces*, 23–24.
45. O'Neill, *Barnett Newman*, 81.
46. Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, 39. Gilbert Cantor claims that "prior to publication of *The Art of Painting* analysis of paintings in terms of the plastic means was virtually unheard of" (*The Barnes Foundation*, 67). That is wrong—Roger Fry and Heinrich Wölfflin devoted earlier books to exactly that concern.
47. Craven, *Modern Art*, 175, 176.
48. Barnes and de Mazia, *The Art of Henri Matisse*, 210–11.
49. Steinberg (*Other Criteria*, 65) links Barnes with Greenberg.
50. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, viii.
51. Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, v.
52. Barnes, "Method in Aesthetics," 89.
53. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 76. See also Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art*.
54. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 235.
55. In "The Art Museum as an Agency of Culture," Albert Levi examines the relationship of Barnes and Dewey. He thinks it paradoxical that Dewey could both attack museums and dedicate his book on aesthetics to Barnes. But Barnes's foundation was just the sort of museum that Dewey's aesthetic demanded.
56. Rockefeller, *John Dewey*, 345.
57. Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 207.
58. *Ibid.*, 253, 383n16.
59. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 3.
60. *Ibid.*, 6.
61. Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 254.
62. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 8.
63. Jensen, *Is Art Good for Us?*, 178. Jensen links this way of thinking with Barnes's collection (193n38).
64. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 11.
65. My discussion draws on Spurling, *The Unknown Matisse*.
66. Schneider, *Matisse*, 241.
67. Shaw, "Profiles," 32.
68. See Flam, *Matisse: The Man and His Art*, chapter 5.
69. Flam, *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation*; Russell, *The World of Matisse*, 144.
70. Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 49.

71. See Neff, "Matisse and Decoration," and Kean, *French Painters, Russian*, chapter 7.

72. This hanging has now been recreated in part in the Museum of Modern Art, New York; see Carrier, "New Museum of Modern Art."

73. See Carrier, *High Art*, 144.

74. Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 244. To discover this, follow the index, which leads from "Crown Jewels" to "Hiding Place" to "Potaynik, taynik" to the definition of *taynik*: "Russian, secret place; see Crown Jewels." For full analysis, see Carrier, "Pale Fire Solved."

75. He also follows Baudelaire, whose poem provided the title for his earlier utopian painting, *Luxe, calme et volupté*: "My child, my sister, just imagine the happiness of voyaging there to spend our lives together, to love to our hearts' content, to love and die in the land which is the image of yourself." "The Invitation to the Voyage" tells of a world, certainly far from ours, where "everything . . . is order and beauty, luxury, calm, voluptuousness" (Baudelaire, *The Poems in Verse*, 125).

76. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 276–77.

77. Barnes and de Mazia, *The Art of Henri Matisse*, 369, 370, 372.

78. Diego Rivera's ill-fated commission for Rockefeller Center was but one attempt to create a new public art. The most famous French muralist of the previous generation was Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes. After the Barnes project was completed, Matisse gave his impression of Chavannes. "My aim has been to translate paint into architecture, to make of the fresco the equivalent of stone or cement. This, I think, is not often done any more. The mural painter today makes pictures, not murals. . . . [Chavannes] approaches it, yes, but does not arrive perfectly in that sense. The walls of the Pantheon, for example, are of stone. Puvis's paintings are too soft in feeling to make the equivalent of that medium" (Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 109–10). The problem, he added two decades later when working on the Vence chapel, is that "a work of art is never made in advance, contrary to the ideas of Puvis de Chavannes, who claimed that one could never visualize the picture one wanted to paint too completely before starting. There is no separation between the thought and the creative act. They are completely one and the same" (*Matisse on Art*, 211).

Puvis de Chavannes presents the past using in-focus linear images within deep illusionistic spaces. He sought to link his art to tradition by making images of antiquity, as if showing subjects from the past would suffice to maintain his relationship with the old master muralists (see Petrie, *Puvis de Chavannes*, and also the visual evidence assembled in Boucher, *Catalogue des dessins et peintures de Puvis de Chavannes*). For him the past remains distant—hence the anemic quality of Chavannes's murals. Matisse, a deeper visual thinker, recognized the impos-