

# \* \* \* P R O F I L E S

ACTION ON WEST FIFTY-THIRD STREET-I

THE world center, institutionally speaking, of the modern movement in the fine and applied arts is the Museum of Modern Art, which was founded here in 1929, and since 1939 has had its own six-story building on West Fifty-third Street, a few doors down from the gray Gothic intricacies of St. Thomas Church. Designed in the "international" style of modern architecture, which the Museum has done much to popularize in this country, the structure is predominantly white and flat on the outside and rather more bright, warm, and sumptuous inside—a glass-and-chrome-and-colored-marble surprise package that may contain anything from a Picasso to a Pierce-Arrow, a Matisse to a potato masher, so long as it is in the modern style. Behind the Museum, as a memorial to one of its most loyal and generous supporters, is the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, a spacious area extending to Fifty-fourth Street and containing a few trees, two square puddles, some statuary, and a great expanse of white marble pavement. "The entire place is a veritable oasis in the drab, gray city," a Tokyo magazine commented recently. "The bright and airy atmosphere does wonders for the tired mind. The works of art are springs of life to those who must live a colorless routine." Many Americans, it would seem, agree. About half a million admission tickets, at sixty cents each, are bought each year, and in addition there are some sixteen thousand members and perhaps four thousand art students—both groups get in free—who come and go constantly. During the war, the Museum was so popular with soldiers and sailors, who also get in free, that the New York Defense Recreation Center ranked it fourth in a list of the city's ten chief tourist attractions, the first three being at that time the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and Rockefeller Center. The sixth was the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The director of the Museum of Modern Art is René d'Harnoncourt, a six-foot-six Austrian nobleman who is one of this country's leading experts on primitive art and on museum exhibition techniques. The chairman of the Museum is John Hay Whitney, who is the son of Payne Whitney, who when he died in 1927 left the biggest estate (\$179,000,000) that had up to then

been appraised for inheritance taxes. The president of the Museum is William Armistead Moale Burden, who is the great-great-grandson of Commodore Vanderbilt and the grandson of Hamilton McK. Twombly. The director of collections of the Museum is Alfred H. Barr, Jr., who is the son of the late Reverend Alfred H. Barr, a professor of homiletics. Shy, frail, low of voice, and scholarly of mien, the austerity of his beak-nosed, bespectacled face relieved only by the kind of secret smile one sees on archaic Greek statues or on the carefully locked features of a psychoanalyst, Barr, at fifty-one, is at once the spirit and the embodiment of the Museum, much as he was in 1929, when, at twenty-seven, he became its first director—a position he held for fourteen years. "The pituitary gland has a very profound influence on the growth of the body," A. Conger Goodyear, the collector, who was president of the Museum during its first ten years, observed in 1939. "The skeleton cannot prosper without it and when its activity is diminished, this leads to obesity and mental defects. Our pituitary gland is called Alfred Barr." Others have called Barr the soul of the Museum—Descartes, it may be recalled, located the soul in the pituitary—and surely, if an institution can have a soul, Barr is it.

The Museum of Modern Art is dedicated to what Barr has termed "the conscientious, continuous, resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity," and by no means only in the fine arts. Its staff continuously evaluates everything with such conscientious resolution that one of its catalogues praised "a cheese-slicer of rough but noble beauty," another prefaced a show of cash registers, electric toasters, gasoline pumps, and similar artifacts with quotations from Plato and Aquinas, and a third, describing a display of automobiles, defined them as, essentially, "hollow, rolling sculpture"—a flight that caused such distress among both sculptors and car owners that a notice was posted at a subsequent automobile show reading, "Automobiles are not expected to achieve the spiritual insight characteristic of sculpture." In the same spirit, a recent book on architecture published by the Museum describes a house designed by Mies van der Rohe as "a quantity of air caught between a floor and a roof,"



Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

which is elucidated into "absolute Platonic architectural space, serenely independent of the transitional emotional values." And Barr himself has resolutely discerned in the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, William Bazziotes, and other members of the Abstract-Expressionist school "a high degree of spontaneity, even automatism, and some dependence on accident." If one feels that a certain air of insubstantiality hovers over all these judgments, the impression is not weakened by some rather casual administrative methods. The Museum has not got around to publishing an annual report since 1948, it lacks at the moment both a treasurer and a secretary, and all checks are signed by Allen Porter, the assistant secretary, who also sells postcards and answers questions in the main lobby during the afternoon rush.

Such an impression would, however, be mistaken. Not only has the Museum in its quarter century of almost phrenetic activity exerted a unique influence on public taste, the study and teaching of art, and the practices of other museums, but it is, from a purely business point of view, a most substantial enterprise. It carries its net worth on its books at \$7,577,000, chiefly represented by \$3,546,000 for its site and building, \$2,353,000 for its library and collections, and \$1,617,000 for its endowment fund. Its budget runs around a million dollars a year. Two-thirds of this goes to pay its hundred and eighty-five employees, and approximately the same proportion of its income is derived from its own operations. Not the least

substantial aspect of the Museum is its board of trustees, which includes, or has included, such great business names as Crane (Mrs. W. Murray), Field (Marshall), Ford (the late Edsel), Guggenheim (Mrs. Simon), Lewisohn (the late Sam A.), Rockefeller (Nelson, David, Mrs. John D., III, and the late Mrs. John D., Jr.), Warburg (Edward M. M.), and Whitney (John Hay). Many an art dealer and museum curator elsewhere has soothed the savage breast of some local magnate, suspicious of "all this modernistic stuff," with a significant reference to names like these, redolent of solid wealth; few Americans care to argue with a hundred million dollars. Collectors constitute the other

main category into which the trustees fall, and these, who would be considered rich by any standard except that of the first category, include, or have included, Stephen C. Clark, Chester Dale, A. Conger Goodyear, Duncan Phillips, Paul J. Sachs, James Thrall Soby, and the late Lillie P. Bliss. Also among the trustees are, or have been, Walt Disney; Henry and Clare Luce; Henry Allen Moe, of the Guggenheim Foundation; William S. Paley, of Columbia Broadcasting; Wallace K. Harrison, who designed the United Nations Building; Philip L. Goodwin, who, with Edward D. Stone, designed the Museum's own building; and the inevitable Beardsley Rumf. There has

been at least one art dealer on the board, the late Lord Duveen of Milbank, but never a painter, modern or otherwise. On occasion, the trustees have suffered much in the cause of modern art. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was depicted in a 1934 show crouching behind sandbags and machine-gunning some noble-looking proletarians; the machine-gunner's son Nelson not only uttered no protest but made a personal call on J. P. Morgan to assure him that the proximity of *his* likeness to that of a chorus girl in another mural was merely artistic license. The torments that Lord Duveen, who liked modern art as little as he dealt in it, endured in the service of the Museum may be imagined; he relieved his feelings at board meetings by making elaborate doodles, which his more advanced colleagues insisted were examples of pure Cubism.


The trustees of the Museum of Modern Art have always played a more active and more important part in the affairs of the institution than do the trustees of most museums. To some extent, this is because so many of them have been ardent collectors themselves, whose enthusiasms and prejudices, in a field where aesthetic values are so unstable, have naturally affected the Museum's policies. But mainly it is because the Museum, which gets no public funds and has never had an endowment income that covered more than a fifteenth of its expenses, has always been more dependent on its trustees' financial backing than an institution like, say, the Metropolitan. In the early years, the trustees financed the Museum of Modern Art almost entirely. Besides making generous annual gifts for running expenses—as late as 1944, the Rockefellers were reportedly giving \$100,000 a year and Stephen Clark \$25,000—they raised an initial endowment of \$630,000 (mostly out of their own pockets), provided the funds to erect the present building, on a site donated by the Rockefellers, and have given the Museum—either directly or by providing





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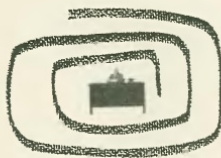
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funds for their purchase—by far the greater part of the paintings and sculptures in its permanent collection. Of late, the Museum has made itself less dependent on contributions, but the trustees still supply most of the third of the budget that its operations do not meet; last year they gave \$192,000 to the Museum, as compared to \$44,000 given by people who were not trustees. In recent years, the Museum has received two large bequests. One, amounting to \$400,000, was left to it by Grace Rainey Rogers, a trustee and benefactor of the Museum, and was used to build a six-story annex to the main structure. (Her name, incidentally, appears twice on the list of patrons emblazoned in silver letters on the marble wall of the lobby of the original building—once as Mrs. Rainey Rogers and once as Grace Rainey Rogers. After her bequest was made public, a grateful but not too observant staff member had the second name added to the roster.) And in 1950 the Museum was pleasantly surprised when the lawyers for the estate of Jessie Wills Post notified it that Miss Post, who had been a \$12.50-a-year member but was known to none of the trustees or staff members (a guard recognized her from a photograph as a frequent visitor, though), had left the Museum \$600,000.

THE flourishing of the Museum is part of the remarkable success story of modern art, a rags-to-riches drama that Horatio Alger, Jr., himself might have flinched from as implausible. The statistics are familiar and impressive: van Gogh's lifetime earnings of \$109 from all his paintings; Renoir's "Mussel Gatherers" selling to a Paris dealer for \$100 in 1879 and to Dr. Albert C. Barnes in 1942 for \$175,000; the young Degas selling "Danseuse à la Barre" for \$100 and the old Degas seeing it bring \$100,000; Picasso sending a group of abstract drawings in 1912 to Steiglitz, who succeeded in selling only one of them—for \$12, or about one one-hundredth of what a Picasso drawing costs today; the Montross Gallery showing thirty van Goghs in 1920 with no sale; Seurat's "La Grande Jatte" selling at his death, in 1891, for \$200 and being bought in 1926 for \$25,000 for the Art Institute of Chicago, which five years later refused \$450,000 for it. The Museum of Modern Art is related to this inspirational

drama as both effect and cause. It couldn't have got the backing it did or attracted the public it has unless it had been launched just as the wave of American interest in modern art was building up; at the same time, its own adroit promotional activities have pushed the wave higher. Barr's money-raising strategy in the Museum's infancy was based partly on the foregoing statistics. "This is beginning to

have a rather mercenary tone," he said apologetically to a group of activists whom he was briefing in 1934 for an assault on the plumper local bank accounts. "But the question of the increase of value in modern pictures is very important, especially if you, as salesmen, are going to talk over the desks of businessmen who may not be interested in modern pictures but who certainly are interested in an increase in value of two hundred thousand per cent."

Another reason for the Museum's success is that it filled a local vacuum. In 1931, fourteen European cities had museums devoted exclusively to modern art, as compared to one—the Museum—in this country, and sixty-six European museums, half of them in Germany, had special galleries of modern art, as compared to twelve over here. The vacuum was most vacuous in New York—or, rather, in Manhattan. By the end of the twenties, museums in places like Buffalo, Worcester, and even Brooklyn had modern sections, whereas the Metropolitan had almost nothing—a Cézanne, a Redon, and a few prints and drawings by Gauguin, Matisse, and others—and gloried in its poverty. When John Quinn, the great New York collector, died, in 1924, he left the most important picture in his collection, Seurat's "Le Cirque," to the Louvre, because he felt it would be received there more hospitably than at the Metropolitan. In contrast, the Art Institute of Chicago gave space in the early twenties to the shows of modern art that were got up by the Chicago Arts Club, and a little later welcomed with ample gallery space the Birch-Bartlett Collection of Post-Impressionist French art. (New York's historic 1913 Armory Show of modern art did not have to roost in an armory when it reached Chicago; it was installed right in the Art Institute.) Today, the Metropolitan is still poor in modern art, although it no longer finds much glory in that fact, while its opposite number in



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Chicago is a leading center of modern as well as traditional art. Walter Pach, in "The Art Museum in America," calls the Museum of Modern Art "the greatest mistake the Metropolitan ever made."

The operative word in the Museum's name is "Modern." The dictionary defines the adjective as meaning "characteristic of the present and recent times; new-fashioned; not antiquated or obsolete. . . ." "Contemporary," on the other hand, is defined as "living, occurring, or existing at the same period of time." Herein lies the distinction between the Museum of Modern Art and the new neighbor it will soon acquire, the Whitney Museum of American Art, whose criterion is simply chronological—anything produced since 1900. To the Museum, then, "modern" is a value term. But what values does it represent? In 1931, Barr attempted a definition: "Modern art is a relative, elastic term that serves conveniently to designate painting, sculpture, architecture, and the lesser visual arts, original and progressive in character, produced especially within the last three decades but including also the 'pioneer ancestors' of the nineteenth century." This is clear enough, provided one knows what is meant by "original" and "progressive," but as time goes on and the various styles of modern art become more and more solidly entrenched, the originality becomes less and less evident, while as for "progressive," the natural question is "Progressive toward what?" Deponent sayeth not. Ten years later, a wiser, if not a sadder, man, Barr admitted, "The truth is that modern art cannot be defined with any degree of finality, in either time or character." Perhaps the most that can be said is that from the Museum's standpoint "modern" represents a prejudice in favor of the new and against the traditional. In any event, "modern" is a fighting word—a battle cry that has a stirring ring to some, a leaden sound to others. It is also, quite literally, a shibboleth. As the Gileadites at the ford of Jordan detected the beaten Ephraimites by making them pronounce the word "shibboleth," which they could get no closer to than "sibboleth," so the partisans of modern art recognize their enemies by their inability to resist adding "-ist" or "-istic" to the adjective. So highly charged, indeed, is the word "modern" that in 1948 the Institute of Modern Art of Boston, which was an outgrowth of the Museum of Modern Art, changed its name to the Institute of Contemporary Art, explaining that "so-called

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'modern' art" had given rise to "a cult of bewilderment and double-talk."

The cultural climate in which modern art and its Museum exist is tropical, superheated by controversy, blazing with broad affirmations and equally sweeping denunciations, shimmering under the hot sun of the absolute. The poet Wallace Stevens described this landscape in a talk he gave at the Museum three years ago:

One of the characteristics of modern art is that it is uncompromising. In this it resembles modern politics and perhaps it would appear on study, including a study of the rights of man and of women's hats and dresses, that everything modern or, possibly, merely new is, in the nature of things, uncompromising. . . . One of the de Goncourts said that nothing in the world hears as many silly things said as a picture in a museum, and in thinking about that remark one has to bear in mind that in the days of the de Goncourts there was no such thing as a museum of modern art. A really modern definition of modern art, instead of making concessions, fixes limits which grow smaller and smaller as time passes and more often than not come to include one man alone, just as if there should be scrawled across the façade of the building in which we now are the words *Cézanne delinea vit*. Another characteristic of modern art is that it is plausible. It has a reason for everything. Even the lack of a reason becomes a reason. Picasso expresses surprise that people should ask what a picture means, and says that pictures are not intended to have meanings. This explains everything. Still another characteristic of modern art is that it is bigoted. Every painter who can be defined as a modern painter becomes, by virtue of that definition, a freeman of the world of art and hence the equal of any other modern painter. We recognize that they differ one from another, but in any event they are not to be judged except by other modern painters.

Of the twenty or so American museums that have important collections of modern art, a few—the Art Institute of Chicago, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Phillips Gallery, in Washington, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, in New York—are outstanding. The Museum of Modern Art is unique. Other museums are stronger in particular artists or schools, but none has anything like so broadly representative a collection. The Museum's own evaluation of its possessions is that "taken as a whole, the twentieth century [collection] of painting and sculpture [is] probably unsurpassed anywhere in the world, though the French painting of the early years of the century is better seen both in Moscow and in the Barnes Foundation." (The references are to the Russians' Museum of Modern Western Art, which houses the great Shchukin and Morozov collections, and

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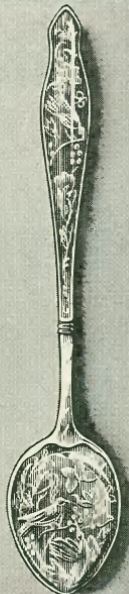
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to the collection of the late Dr. Albert C. Barnes, in Merion, Pennsylvania. Neither the Moscow display nor the one in Merion has been open to the public for years, the former for obvious *raisons d'état*, the latter for reasons personal to Dr. Barnes. The Moscow collection may soon be reopened, but Dr. Barnes' widow continues to exclude the public and most scholars, including Barr.) As of January 30, 1953, the Museum's collection consisted of 829 paintings, 210 sculptures, 310 drawings, 4,000 prints, 2,500 photographs, and 670 pieces of furniture, utensils, and other examples of modern design; it was insured for \$2,500,000. Occupying the entire second floor and part of the third floor—and even then there is space to show only a small part of it—the collection is the one fairly permanent item, except for its guardian, Barr, to be found on the restless premises of the Museum. "Modern art is as complex a subject as modern science and fluctuates more rapidly," Barr has said. "The museums of modern art function at a rate of speed very different from that of the more sedate museums of historical art." The complexity may be suggested by a far from complete list of modern "isms." There are Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Post-Impressionism. There are Realism, Magic Realism, Romantic Realism, Regional Realism, Surrealism, and Super-Realism. There are Primitivism and Futurism, Objectivism and Non-Objectivism (whose leader, Rodchenko, in schism from Malevich's Suprematism, painted "Black on Black" as a retort to the latter's "White on White"). There are Cubism, Expressionism, Constructivism, Neo-Romanticism, and Dadaism. There are Nuclear Mysticism, founded and practiced solely by Salvador Dali, and Merzism, founded by Kurt Schwitters, who made handsome collages from the contents of wastebaskets. There are Subjectivism and Intra-Subjectivism, not to mention Orphism, Purism, Fauvism, Vorticism, Rayonism, Synchronism, Biomorphism, and Neo-Plasticism.

In the simple old days, an art museum was a dignified place, with columns, that displayed, in an elegant hush, such works of art as it owned. Attendance was, so to speak, optional; the stuff was there, if anybody cared to come and look at it. This passivity has pretty much disappeared, along with the hush. If people are not actually dragged in off the street, as into a Houston Street clothing store, they are lured in by ingenious showmanship and by appeals to appetites that are a lot more mundane than a de-

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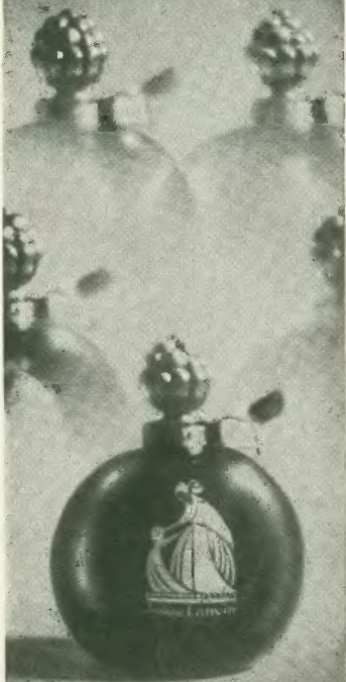
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sire to contemplate works of art. "The American art museum of today is a changed place from the art museum of a decade ago," John D. Forbes wrote in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* in 1941. "The cry is for action and novelty. Handicrafts and hobbies are fostered. The frequency and velocity of minor loan exhibitions have increased. Press agents have been hired, committees appointed, and cocktail parties given. Classes of instruction for children and adults have been formed. . . . The Museum of Modern Art has grown up and in a few short years established a sort of factory for the mass production of art 'features,' motion pictures, travelling displays, and quantities of printed matter. Lesser museums in smaller centers have followed its lead. Some have even become virtual satellites of the larger body. . . . The urge to *do* something has been very widespread among museums." Three years later, in *Art News*, Agnes Mongan, of the Fogg Art Museum, at Harvard, wrote about the Museum of Modern Art in somewhat the same strain: "In no other museum in the world has a schedule as heavy as that in 53rd Street been attempted. One can but wonder if it is humanly possible to maintain it." After observing that even though the Museum's staff seemed able to keep up the killing pace, perhaps the public couldn't, and that "there is also a saturation point in the power to consume," Miss Mongan gently suggested, "Might it not be wiser to offer us artistic sustenance at more widely spaced intervals?" This thought frequently, indeed chronically, occurs to the members of the Museum staff; every year they resolve to cut down on shows, and every year they fail to do so. The joint has been jumping for twenty-five years now.

"**W**HAT is this, a three-ring circus?" a group of artists once asked in a manifesto denouncing the Museum of Modern Art. Their rhetoric was thrice too moderate. The Museum is a nine-ring circus, at least. The traditional function of preserving and displaying its own art works takes up only one ring. In addition, it is a community center, a movie theatre, a library, a publishing house, a school, a provider of shows for other institutions, an arbiter of taste in everything from frying pans to country houses, and, above all, an impresario that every year puts on some twenty all-new productions, with new lighting and scenery and mostly new casts, borrowed from

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collectors, dealers, artists, and other museums. As director, or ringmaster, d'Harnoncourt presides over all nine rings, a task that at times strains even his considerable executive and diplomatic resources. He also has to keep an eye on such sideshows as an annual Children's Holiday Carnival; New Talent exhibitions; a line of Christmas cards, of which the front desk sells some hundred thousand a year; gallery talks by a "docent," a peripatetic explicator who walks and talks three times a week; and a Junior Council, energetically headed by Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, III, and Mrs. Donald Straus, which gives receptions, put on a series of lectures every winter, and has started a thriving Art Lending Service.

As a community center, the Museum is just about the biggest club in town. Its sixteen thousand members are divided almost equally between residents of New York City, who pay dues of fifteen dollars a year, and non-residents, who pay twelve-fifty. In addition to free admission to the Museum, members get from two to four Museum books a year at no cost to them, as well as invitations to openings. They also have the use of a spacious penthouse atop the building, where light refreshments are served at popular prices (sandwiches—small—ten cents) and where there is a sun deck from which an excellent view of the side of Rockefeller Center may be obtained. Since the Museum is just under five hundred feet away from St. Thomas Church, it is forbidden by a city ordinance to sell liquor on the premises, but an oasis will bloom next spring when the Whitney Museum moves up from Eighth Street to a new building on West Fifty-fourth Street, running back to adjoin the Museum on its northwestern, or secular, side. With the addition of a bar and restaurant, not to mention the Whitney pictures, there will come into being an unrivalled community center for lovers of modern art. The connection between the two museums, by the way, will be only geographical; no merger is involved.

As a movie theatre, the Museum runs off two daily showings of movies in its basement auditorium, which accommodates an audience of five hundred in remarkably comfortable seats. The movies come from its Film Library, which collects, preserves, exhibits, and circulates old American and foreign films of aesthetic or historical importance, and which is unique. Without the Library, it is safe to say, a great many film "classics" would now be lost for-

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ever. The Library's ten million feet of films include most of D. W. Griffith's work, Erich von Stroheim's "Greed," Sergei Eisenstein's "Potemkin," Carl-Theodor Dreyer's "The Passion of Joan of Arc," and George Seitz's "Love Finds Andy Hardy." Its Circulating Film Programs have to date gone out to some two thousand customers—mainly clubs, colleges, and film societies. The Library's greatest current problem is raising funds to make new copies of old classics that are about to go to pieces. Richard Griffith, the Library's curator, estimates that in the next five years about a hundred movies in the collection, many of them the only known copies in existence, will have deteriorated beyond repair unless the money can soon be found to make new negatives or master prints, at seven hundred dollars apiece.

On the Museum's fourth floor, supervised by Bernard Karpel, there is the world's biggest library devoted exclusively to modern art. It contains fourteen thousand books, fifteen thousand slides, twenty thousand photographs, and a hundred files of reference clippings, as well as special sections dealing with the movies, ballet, the theatre, and modern architecture and design.

The Museum is famous for its publications, which are presided over by Monroe Wheeler; last year its sales of books, pamphlets, and catalogues amounted to \$138,000. In the thirties, Barr developed a style of catalogue that both satisfied the cognoscenti and interested the laity by combining an elegance of format, a scholarly precision, and a richness of data, none of them usual in works on modern art at that time, with a clear, readable style, which was even less usual. The Museum's pioneering catalogues, some of them really books, are still models of how to popularize without vulgarizing. It is said that even French intellectuals were impressed by them. The Museum's varied publications were described a few years ago by *Publishers' Weekly* as "written expressly for simple, democratically-minded people." Together with the circulating exhibitions, they have done much to encourage the teaching of modern art in American colleges. Altogether, the Museum has published a hundred and eighty-three books and pamphlets, ranging from "Douglas Fairbanks" and "American Battle Painting, 1776-1918" to such erudite works as John Rewald's "History of Impressionism," Beaumont Newhall's "History of Photography," and books by Barr on Picasso and Matisse. The two best-sellers have been

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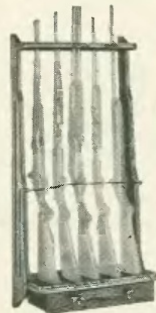
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Elizabeth B. Mock's "If You Want to Build a House" and Barr's "What Is Modern Painting?," known around the premises as "Wimpy," as his "Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art" is known as "Pass It, Moma."

In the role of an educator, the Museum runs the People's Art Center, which occupies two floors of the Rogers annex and offers classes—both day and evening—in painting, sculpture, wood-working, jewelry making, and ceramics. There are three terms a year, each with an attendance of some five hundred adults and seven hundred children. Victor D'Amico has directed the Center since its founding, in 1937, and in its sixteen years of existence it has instructed around ten thousand pupils, in addition to the large but undetermined number of art teachers who have attended its annual four-day conferences on art education. In a sense, of course, the whole Museum is an educational institution. "Underlying all this feverish activity," Forbes wrote in his *Journal of Aesthetics* article, "is the idea that the principal job and justification of the museum of art is Education."

Every year, the Museum packs and ships out some fifty of its famous circulating exhibitions, each of which averages eight showings a season. The exhibits range from "Recent American Woodcuts," at seventy-five dollars for three weeks, to "Built in USA: Post-War Architecture," at three hundred and fifty dollars for three weeks. The department is headed by Porter McCray, and in its first twenty years it has dreamed up 518 exhibitions, which have been shown a total of 6,700 times by 3,350 schools, colleges, museums, clubs, and so on. Its scope has become more global since last fall, when the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund put up \$125,000 for a five-year program of exchanging art shows on an international basis. The Museum's first exports were a collection of modern American paintings and sculpture to Paris and one of American water colors to Tokyo, and its first imports were shows of Japanese and Italian architecture.

As an arbiter of taste, the Museum

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has had something to say—or, rather, to show—about practically every visual aspect of American life. It started off in this field in 1934, with a display of “machine art,” and the aspects it has since covered by means of special exhibits include the American snapshot, children’s playgrounds, the films of D. W. Griffith, Buckminster Fuller’s Dymaxion Deployment Unit (a bombproof shelter sleeping six), war posters, advertising art, postage stamps, theatre arts, how children paint, and the Thomas Lamb Wedge-Lock Handle (curved to fit the hand, for use on pots, doors, suitcases, and all other objects requiring handles). It is currently planning a show of public lettering as evidenced in signs like “NO SMOKING,” “U.S. POST OFFICE,” and “MEN.” Behind some of its shows there is an obvious reforming motive, which is sometimes successful, sometimes not. Its subway-art show of 1938, which it put on because it considered the city’s subway stations “436 potential underground art galleries” and wanted “to combat an atmosphere which is always lugubrious and occasionally sinister,” was a demonstration of experiments in new media for murals “indestructible enough to be suitable for use in subway stations.” Nothing came of it. Nor did anything come of the Museum’s ingenious “Are Clothes Modern?” show, which made it clear that they are not modern, or beautiful, or rational, or economic, by such devices as a life-size diagram of a man’s suit showing how many needless buttons and pockets it has, and models of the female body as it would have looked if it had conformed to the fashions of various periods. On the other hand, the Museum’s automobile show of 1951 probably played some part in improving the appearance of our cars from repulsive to so-so. The faint but perceptible “Continental look” of some of the new models may reflect the Museum’s influence somewhat. “I think we’ve helped with pressure for cleaning up car designs, but we haven’t been able to lighten the weight of chromium,” Barr says. The most spectacular conversion was that of Raymond Loewy. Although at a symposium held in connection with the show, he defended with acerbity his 1950 Studebaker design (which another speaker, Wilder Hobson, an automotive connoisseur, referred to as “the rolling juke box”), he later bought and studied some Italian cars, and his 1953 model shows their chastening influence so strongly that it was the only entirely American car the Museum deemed worthy of a place in its second auto

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show, last October. But the Museum's most effective intervention as an *arbitrator elegantiarum* has been in architecture and in home furnishings. Its architecture department has done much to popularize Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright. And its pre-Christmas exhibitions of utilitarian objects of modern design have influenced the buyers for New York stores. The influence spread in 1950, when the Museum set up a Good Design department, run by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., to collaborate with the Chicago Merchandise Mart, which is the chief buying center for the country's retailers of home furnishings, in putting on two big shows at the Mart and a smaller one at the Museum—events that have since been repeated yearly.

The ninth ring of the Museum's circus is, like the first, occupied wholly by art, of all things. The Department of Painting and Sculpture is headed by Andrew C. Ritchie, formerly of the Frick Museum and the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, whose "Sculpture of the 20th Century" was recently published by the Museum. He operates as a theatrical producer rather than as a custodian. Most of the Museum's exhibition space is occupied not by its own collection but by shows of borrowed material, and these are presented in galleries that are specially "set," like a stage—a method that was worked out by the Museum in the thirties and that has had a revolutionary effect on other museums. The details of the method are familiar enough today: the movable walls, frequently repainted to meet the color requirements of incoming shows; the lighting devices, as flexible as those in a theatre, and including indirect effects, baby spots, floodlights, and the like; the expository wall captions, giving technical, biographical, and historical information; the asymmetric hanging of pictures according to their historical or other significant relationships rather than, as used to be common museum practice, arranging them symmetrically by size or shape, which Barr feels is like arranging books by the color of their bindings; and, on occasion, the use of mazelike corridors to set the visitor's feet in the direction they should go.

All in all, since its founding the Museum has thought up and put on five hundred and forty-seven shows, whether of art or more prosaic subjects. In 1932, some of the trustees began to worry about the rate at which the staff was using up new ideas, their fear being that it might presently run out of them. Barr reassured the trustees with a memo outlining a ten-year exhibition program. If

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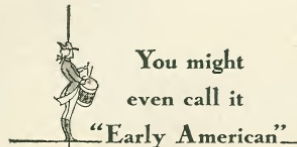
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IT'S  
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FUN

SEE  
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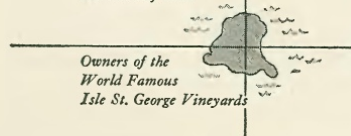
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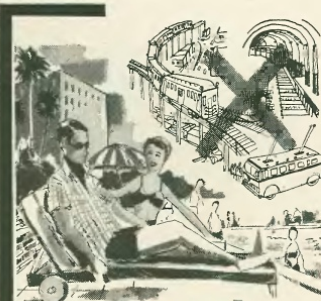


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tive importance of these two sources has changed in an interesting way since the Museum was founded. In 1930, it received \$107,500 in contributions (almost all from trustees) and less than one-fifth of that amount from membership dues, the sale of catalogues, and other sources of operating revenue. Since then, the balance has slowly tilted the other way, until today the Museum is self-supporting to an extent rarely achieved by an art museum. Of the \$1,059,000 that went for its expenses last year, nearly two-thirds (\$675,000) came from operating income (including \$162,000 in admission fees and \$146,000 in membership dues) and just over one-third (\$354,000) from contributions, leaving a slight (\$30,000) deficit. Originally open free to the public, the Museum has charged admission since 1939. It is something of an entrepreneurial triumph to induce people to pay sixty cents to get into an art museum.

BARR, who has done more than anyone else to give the Museum of Modern Art its form and character, lives with his wife, Margaret, and their sixteen-year-old daughter, Victoria, in a modest apartment at Ninety-sixth Street and Madison Avenue. The furniture is sparse, simple, and modern, and the walls are hung with many pictures, including a big Miró, two Picasso drawings, a small and lovely Juan Gris, and a Burchfield water color. "All our spare cash, which we can't spare, goes into buying pictures, which we can't afford," says Mrs. Barr. Born Margaret Scolari-Fitzmaurice, in Rome, she is the daughter of an Italian art dealer and an Irish mother. Upon coming to this country, in the twenties, she taught Italian at Vassar for four years. She met Barr in 1929, at the Museum's opening show, and they were married the following year. Although, like her husband, Mrs. Barr has a degree in art history, and although she is a woman of great energy and competence, who has worked closely with her husband on a number of his books, she has steered clear of any official connection with the Museum. "That was one of the wisest decisions we ever made," she says.

The Barrs spend their summers in a cottage, designed by Barr, in Greensboro, Vermont. Another cottage, nearby, is occupied by his mother, who, at eighty-five, is an ardent liberal in both politics and art and approves of her son's taste in painting. (She has one other son, Andrew Wilson Barr, who is a partner in the public-accounting

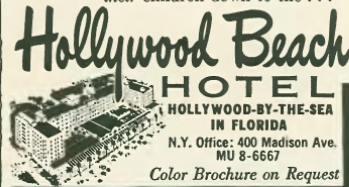


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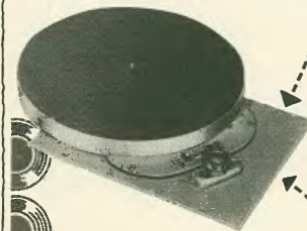


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firm of Price Waterhouse & Co.) For Barr, the summers are a refreshing change of scene, since he is very fond of nature, but hardly a vacation. He writes most of the day, knocking off in the late afternoon to swim, chop down some of the cedars that persistently invade his land, or take a bird walk. Birds are second only to art among his interests, with chess a poor third. It is ironical that looking at art and looking at birds should be Barr's favorite occupations, for his eyes, while keen, tire easily. By night, they are often too worn-out for him to be able to read, and when he has insomnia, which is much of the time, he listens by the hour to records or to the small-hour disc-jockey programs. One reason Barr has trouble sleeping is that he is a great worrier. He takes things hard, and ponders and puzzles and broods. Then he usually purges himself with an exercise in his most congenial mode of self-expression—writing. (He has never painted.) Like his mother, he is a political liberal, and these days he worries a good deal about freedom of expression in the arts. He recently gave considerable time to the successful fight to rescind the ban on Rossellini's movie "The Miracle." As an articulate worrier, he is the Museum's chief writer of letters to the editor. A typical example is one the *Saturday Review of Literature* published in August, 1950:

I suppose it is natural for the editor of a literary magazine to feel that he may cut an article before he publishes it, but cutting—or "cropping"—a painting is a different matter. Without warning your readers you have actually cropped large strips off both sides of this picture [Picasso's "Three Musicians," which the Museum had recently acquired], thus seriously damaging what is generally considered one of the half dozen greatest compositions in modern painting. . . . In France literary people, including many of the greatest, are seriously interested in contemporary painting and sculpture. . . . Here in America the literary world seems comparatively blind so far as the visual arts are concerned.

The personality of the man who shaped the Museum is as low-keyed and ascetic as that of his creation is vivid and worldly. Barr has a sound knowledge not only of art and ornithology but of politics, history, military strategy, popular songs, and other subjects, weighty and trivial—a range of interests his fellow-workers find awe-inspiring. Such a range is not usual in the world of art, whose denizens, like those of the allied worlds of music and the theatre, tend to be culturally one-sided. Barr is also respected for his rock-bound integrity; he is probably the only person on record who, when asked if he had a minute, has

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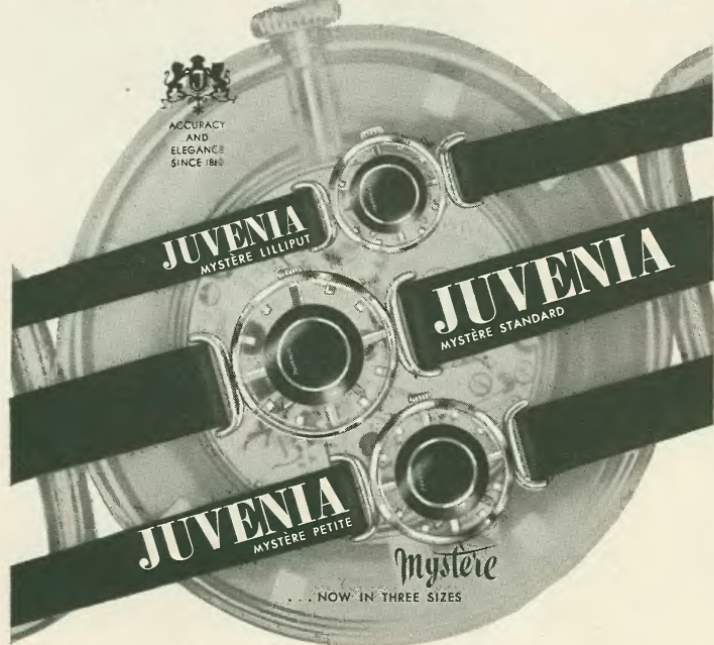
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replied "No." The recipient of this blunt intelligence did not take it amiss, for the chill wind of honesty in Barr is tempered by courtesy and a shy concern for the people who work with him. "Alfred will think about any problem you bring him, no matter whether he's directly concerned or not," says D'Amico, the director of the People's Art Center. "He never makes you feel as if you had asked a foolish question."

One disconcerting habit Barr has is that of thinking before he speaks. "If you say, 'It's a nice day,' Alfred has to stop and decide if it really is a nice day before he answers," William Lieberman, who has worked with Barr in various capacities for many years and is now head of the Museum's print department, said not long ago. "On more complicated issues, he may turn and look out of the window for what seems an eternity. It's not that he's bored or rude. He's just thinking. When he finally does say something, it comes out in organized sentences, with beginnings, middles, and ends, and he doesn't take it back later." It is all the more difficult to know what is going on inside Barr's head because his expression has the impassivity commonly associated with Orientals. When he visits a gallery, he inspects the pictures carefully and methodically, without revealing his reactions by so much as the twitch of an eyelid; this is sometimes unnerving to dealers, always to artists. He indicates enthusiasm by silence, which might be helpful if he did not also fall silent when he is irritated. No one has ever heard him raise his voice in anger, though there are some who think they have detected, in moments of great stress, a slight grinding of the teeth.

Barr often seems absent-minded because he thinks at odd times. During a talk on modern art under totalitarianism that he gave at the Museum last winter, he read a quotation from Lenin out of a book and then lapsed into silence as his eyes continued to travel down the page. Finally, he looked up, smiling apologetically, and said, "I'm sorry. I got interested." His efforts at camaraderie, while conscientious, are hampered by an almost total incapacity for small talk, as well as by his shyness and woolgathering. He has been known to ask, rather desperately, as a conversational gambit, "Have you heard any funny stories lately?" And there was the sad case of the new young curator. He had met Barr before he took the job, but for months after he joined the staff he received only covert glances when the two men passed each other in the corridors. At last, Barr abruptly materialized in the new-

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comer's office and, after some backing and filling, managed to get out, "I want you to know, Mr. —, how extremely happy we are that you are with us." The young curator was pleased, but considerably less so a few days later, when Barr again materialized, again hung fire, and then said, "I want you to know, Mr. —, how," etc.

It would be a mistake, however, to regard Barr as simply another nice old absent-minded professor. In his quiet, rectitudinous way, he is more than something of a politician. Patiently and persistently, he works behind the scenes, and one morning the trustees wake up to find that they have a new department, which up to that moment they had not realized they wanted. What Goodyear used to call "the fine Italian hand of Alfred Barr" has had its part in creating an atmosphere of intrigue in the Museum, where things are not necessarily what they seem to such an extent that one bewildered artist has called the place "The House of Mystery If Not Mirth." Staff life has always been chancy at the Museum, though much more so in the past than today. During the forties, there was an almost Renaissance flavor to the Museum's inner life, with trustees and department heads forming cabals, making forays, and consummating administrative assassinations like so many *condottieri*. In 1943, after fourteen years as director, Barr himself was demoted to advisory director, a phantasmal post in which he languished briefly before beginning a remarkable comeback.

Describing her relations with the Museum, Peggy Guggenheim writes in her autobiography, "I did not then realize all the machinations of that institution and never will." She also found Barr puzzling: "Alfred Barr's books on modern art had been my Bible for years, so I was naturally longing to meet him. We went to see him one day, and I was surprised to find someone who looked like Abraham Lincoln. His conversation was serious and learned. He was shy but very charming and I liked him at once. Later, when I knew him better, I hated his cagey quality, and never



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knew what he was driving at; but he is one of the people whom I respect in the world who has done a pioneering job and done it well." A friend of Barr's feels that except for the resemblance to Lincoln, which no one else seems to have caught, this is a reasonably accurate impression, and he does not consider it derogatory. "There is something of the Jesuit about Alfred," he says. "But as the Jesuits practiced their wiles *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, so Barr maneuvers always for the greater glory of modern art and the Museum."

Barr is indeed a dedicated man—a Presbyterian missionary bringing the life-giving Word to the heathen, whose ranks he has helped deplete considerably in his thirty years of labor in the vineyard. "Alfred is hard to work with because he *knows* he's right, and the hell of it is he generally is," says Philip Johnson, director of the Museum's architecture-and-design department. "That reasonable air of his is deceptive. It's just the sugar-coating on the pill of absolute certainty." Barr's certainty appears to come from moral and intellectual convictions rather than from aesthetic reactions of the sort that involve enthusiasm, disgust, delight, and other unkempt feelings. A writer in *Vogue* once described Barr as "a simple man who can make enemies in the fanatical field of modern art by not moving a muscle of his face," and continued, "He has retained his pure sense of the judicial, which is always infuriating to partisans. . . . Probably there is no one in this country who has looked at so much modern art and has remained so tolerant and so anti-dogmatic." This imperturbable tolerance and judiciousness may indicate some lack of emotional response to art, inasmuch as in other ways Barr is a very passionate person, having the scholar's greed for data, the intellectual's joy in refining the crude stuff of reality, the pedagogue's pleasure in instructing and explaining, and the crusader's righteous zeal. "I don't think it has ever occurred to Alfred that art is something to enjoy," a member of the Museum staff once declared. Barr is said to have turned down a Matisse because it was "too easy"—it didn't offer any problems at all, he complained—and to have objected to another canvas by saying, "It's too pretty. I don't trust it." The contrast between the Guggenheim Museum, as it has been done over by its new director, James Johnson Sweeney, and Barr's galleries is instructive. Sweeney presents his pictures for themselves rather than as ob-

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jects for instruction or scholarly study. He hangs them on pure-white walls to bring out their colors freshly, rules out wall captions, and even frames, as distracting, and "composes" each wall by arranging the pictures on it with an eye to their aesthetic effect on each other and on the whole wall. Barr, on the other hand, while he too "composes" his walls, does so within a pedagogic framework, grouping his pictures according to their historical relationships and often providing long and informative captions.

Barr on paper is as persuasively articulate as Barr in the flesh is not. Literary talent is not common among museum officials and almost too common among critics of modern art. To anyone familiar with the wooden inarticulacies set forth by the former and the heady brew served up by the latter, Barr's light, clear, and reasonable style is refreshing. His range is wide. There is his Wall Caption, or In a Nutshell, style, typified in a summary of the De Stijl movement: "Three elements or principles formed the fundamental basis of De Stijl, whether in painting, architecture, sculpture, furniture, or typography: in form, the rectangle; in color, the 'primary' hues—red, blue, and yellow; in composition, asymmetric balance." There is his Reassuring Expository, or This May Hurt Just a Little, style: "Art changes gradually. Even radical innovations develop step by step. Much modern art may seem queer and unintelligible to us simply because we may not have followed these successive steps. . . . To begin to appreciate such a picture [a Cézanne], to let it sink in, a few minutes, at least, of careful study is necessary." There is his Freewheeling, Rhetorical style: "Competitive structural virtuosity helped raise both the Empire State Building and the vertiginous vaults of Beauvais, abetted of course by twentieth-century real-estate values on the one hand and on the other by thirteenth-century municipal rivalry and some concern with the glory of God." There is his High Level style, as in his appraisal of B. H. Wilenski's "The Modern Movement in Art" as "an attempt by means of an exasperatingly repetitious dialectic to divide all modern painting into three clumsy categories—architectural, romantic, and descriptive—which in turn can be modified by hyphenation with three other adjectives: original, derivative, and popular. Cartesian fallacy could scarcely be carried further." Barr can also handle the Popular Punchy style, as in a piece he wrote in 1942 for

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Barr does not lose his literary aplomb even when he is confronted with the more impenetrable productions of the avant-garde's avant-garde. There is, for example, his description, in *Harper's Bazaar*, of "Galaxy," a large and baffling artifact constructed out of lumber by Frederick Kiesler, which occupied an entire room in the Museum's 1952 "Fifteen Americans" show and was subsequently purchased by Nelson Rockefeller:

*Galaxy* is architecture for sky-gazers; its plan is a cross with arms raised in amazement; its major axis slopes abruptly toward a vanishing-point like Borromini's false perspective in the Palazzo Spada; its four caryatids are a dolphin's spine, a hippocampus, a lobster claw and an ichthyosaur caressed by a boomerang; its lintels are driftwood and a comb-finned gar.

*Galaxy* is a four-poster in which Sinbad, Jonah, Crusoe, and Ahab may sit eternally, back to back, telling each other their stories, slowly, with low voices and credulous ears.

*Galaxy* is a pergola built of jetsam where refugees from the compass and ruler may dry their nets in peace.

*Galaxy* is a drifting raft where common sense, watched by the skeletons of the four winds, will die of thirst.

*Galaxy* is a conspiracy for discrediting Cadillacs.

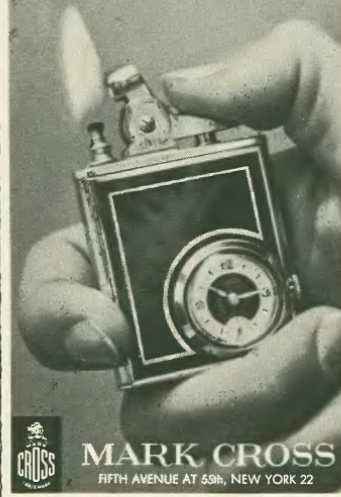
*Galaxy* is the tomb of know-how, the supreme anti-technological gazebo.

Although this at first glance appears to be in the Heady Brew style of modern-art criticism, it carries matters so far as to become a *jeu d'esprit* whose effervescent rhetoric is at once a genial parody of that style and also a charming prose poem in itself.

WHILE people often regard Barr as a fine example of the New England conscience, which, indeed, he is, he was born in Detroit and brought up in Baltimore. His father was a Presbyterian minister, like his father, and, in his later years—he died in 1935—professor of homiletics at McCormick Theological Seminary, in Chicago. Two of Barr's uncles were Presbyterian ministers, one a missionary in Persia who preached every Sunday in four languages—Turkish, Persian, Armenian, and English—and the other a professor

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of Semitic languages at Princeton Theological Seminary. If there is an ecclesiastical sobriety in Barr's manner and an evangelical fervor in his approach to modern art, it is hardly surprising. In Baltimore, Barr attended the Boys' Latin School, where he was an earnest student, an enthusiastic end on the football team, and a sedulous collector of plants, butterflies, stamps, rocks, and almost everything else. While his classmates were trying to decide whether to become locomotive engineers or professional ballplayers, he was rather inclining in the direction of paleontology. Toward the end of his school years, he began to suspect he was a writer. "I got excited about words and started to write longer themes than I had to," he says. When his Latin teacher gave him Henry Adams' "Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres" as a graduation present, Barr added art historian to his list of possible careers.

Barr was still wavering between art, literature, and paleontology when, at sixteen, he entered Princeton. Two courses he took in his sophomore year decided him. One was a survey of ancient art. "I had to do an essay on the Greek temple, and for the first time I read more than one book on the same subject," he has said. "I was amazed, and rather shocked, to find that authorities disagreed on even so simple a point as how many columns a certain Greek temple had. That was my introduction to scholarship." The other course, and the one that really fixed his decision, was in medieval art. It was taught by Professor Charles Rufus Morey, and Barr was immediately fascinated by Morey's synthetic method, which brought every aspect of medieval culture, from folklore and handicrafts to theology, to bear on the subject. By his junior year, Barr was majoring in art history, and was developing an interest in modern art, partly because he liked what he saw of it in *Vanity Fair* and the *Dial* and partly because his teachers made fun of it. "I've always had to guard against a tendency to be in opposition for the sake of opposition," he says. "Maybe it's got something to do with being Scotch and Presbyterian." Barr graduated in 1922, and the next year he took an M.A., also at Princeton. Then, at twenty-one, he drew up a Five Year Plan for himself, the essence of which was that he would change his job every year, travelling about like a sort of journeyman-scholar learning his trade. The first year, he taught at Vassar, where he acted in amateur theatricals, put on a Kandinsky exhibit, and made



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an impression on the not unimpressible student body with his pale young scholar's face, his patient and brilliant teaching of Renaissance art, and his custom of wearing unmatched coats and pants, an informality then so novel that he was known as Mr. Mixed Suits. That summer, he made a rapid and economical Grand Tour of Europe, sometimes "doing" two or three towns in a day; in all, it cost some five hundred dollars, including passage in "student-third." The next year, he studied at Harvard, teaching there just enough to pay his bills and spending one afternoon each week examining the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' great collection of Chinese paintings, most of which were stored away in the cellar. He was already getting a reputation as a forward youth, who read papers at College Art Association meetings telling his elders and presumptive betters how to teach their subject. Professor Morey, affectionately worried and hoping to lure the stray back onto the home range, persuaded him to return to Princeton as an instructor in art in the fall of 1925.

But it was too late. The stray had become a confirmed maverick. When, the following year, Wellesley offered to let Barr teach a course in modern art, he accepted instantly. The Wellesley course was a highly original affair. Not only was it the first course in any American college to be devoted entirely to modern art but it was also a preview of the Museum of Modern Art. Besides painting and sculpture, it included the movies, photography, music, the theatre (Barr took his class to see things like an Expressionist performance, in Yiddish, of "The Dybbuk"), architecture (the girls rode the Boston & Albany from Wellesley to Boston to inspect the stations along the way that had been designed by the great nineteenth-century architect H. H. Richardson), and machine art (each student spent a dollar in the local five-and-ten on what seemed to her the best-designed objects, and these were then arranged on tables to form Constructivist designs). To find out how much prospective students knew about modern art, Barr drew up a questionnaire, which was printed by *Vanity Fair*. The maverick was kicking up his heels. "BOSTON IS MODERN ART PAUPER" ran the headline over a front-page article by Barr in the *Harvard Crimson* of October 30, 1926. "It is surprising, and even shocking, to find so little interest in modern art in Boston," the article began. It went on to present a survey of the Bostonian wasteland and ended with

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glad tidings of an exhibition at the Fogg Art Museum of the *Dial's* portfolio called "Living Art—Twenty Facsimiles." (Out of modesty or calculation, or both, the author omitted to mention that he and his friend Jere Abbott had presented the portfolio to the Fogg.) The art critic of the Boston *Herald* rose to the bait like a hungry pike. "Cézanne was a poor painter with bad eyesight," he wrote. Van Gogh was "a crazy galoot who painted for years in an insane asylum" and Gauguin a perpetrator of "gross caricatures in the name of art," while as for Seurat, "his quaintness is liable to degenerate into affectation." Fifteen years later, Barr wrote happily that this attack "prepared me to accept with enthusiasm the miraculous chance for a constructive revenge which the Museum gave me in 1929 when these same four masters triumphed in our first exhibition." Revenge is sweet, and constructive revenge doubly so. The Boston critics of 1926-27, however, unaware that progress was marching in Barr's direction, continued to grumble about "the very modern Mr. Barr of Cambridge and Wellesley."

In those days, Barr was like an alert hunting dog nosing out the indubitably modern in art. There was a singular dearth of even simple knowledge of the subject in academic circles; between 1925 and 1930, according to his count, this country's two leading journals of art history printed, between them, just five articles on any aspect of modern art. Obviously, he felt, he would have to go abroad, where the study and practice of modern art was less arcane. In an application for a Harvard fellowship "to enable me to spend a year in Europe," he explained, "I wish to study *contemporary* European culture . . . to gather material for a thesis, 'The Machine in Modern Art.' . . . Contemporary art is puzzling and chaotic but is, to many of us, living and important in itself and as a manifestation of our amazing though none too lucid civilization. I confess I find the art of the present more interesting and moving than the art of the Sung or even the Quattrocento." The fellowship was not forthcoming, but by the summer of 1927 Barr had saved enough to spend a year abroad without it. Accompanied by Abbott, he stayed several months in England and travelled widely on the Continent—particularly in Germany, where the modern movement was most enthusiastically accepted and where, in Dessau, the teaching and the practice of advanced tendencies in painting, sculpture, architecture, furniture, typogra-



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phy, and industrial design were carried on under one roof at the Bauhaus, a spiritual ancestor of the Museum of Modern Art. Barr and Abbott also spent two months in Soviet Russia. At first, it was exhilarating, but soon the two young men became aware of some disturbing signs of the times. The Museum of Abstract Art had been closed down by the authorities, and the guides in Moscow's Museum of Modern Western Art sermonized on its modern paintings as examples of bourgeois decadence; there was also a visit Barr and Abbott paid to a Bauhaus-trained designer whose wife took them aside to lament that he had ever returned to Russia. A typical entry in the journal Barr kept of the trip is that for January 6, 1928: "The exhibition to which Diego Rivera was to take us was closed suddenly. Two reasons were suggested by the Mexican: first, there were portraits of the opposition; second, in a composition representing Lenin's funeral, some figures were nude." Barr had gone to Russia with high hopes, but he left it disillusioned—permanently—with Communist art policy.

In a "Dutch Letter" that Barr wrote for *The Arts* while he was abroad, he complained that "the American takes it for granted that his public museums should be indifferent to modern art." After he had returned home and had given another year of his modern-art course at Wellesley, he was unexpectedly presented with an opportunity to do something about this indifference. In the late spring of 1929, Professor Paul J. Sachs, associate director of the Fogg Art Museum, who had taught him the history of drawings and prints at Harvard, told him that some ladies in New York were thinking of founding a museum of modern art there. Barr said that was a fine idea. "How would you like to run it?" asked Sachs. After dazedly coming to the realization that Sachs was in earnest, Barr said he liked that idea, too. Sachs, who has been called "the Felix Frankfurter of the American art world" because of his skill and assiduity in placing young protégés in important museum posts, had made a major placement. —DWIGHT MACDONALD

(This is the first of two articles  
on Mr. Barr.)

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