

ART COLLECTING AND SHAPING PUBLICS AROUND
THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
A PHILADELPHIA STORY

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Brian Seymour
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Examining Committee Members:

Dr. Tracy Cooper, Advisory Chair, Art History
Dr. Gerald Silk, Art History
Dr. Erin Pauwels, Art History
Dr. Philip Glahn, Painting, Tyler School of Art

ABSTRACT

My dissertation traces the rhetoric of two Philadelphians, attorney John G. Johnson and Dr. Albert C. Barnes, as they collected art with a specific public in mind, namely working Philadelphians around the turn of the twentieth century. The individual bequests and resulting legacy institutions of Johnson and Barnes serve as rich case studies to assess the efforts of collectors to control the reception of their respective collections by the public. These particular histories, exceptional in their own ways, are juxtaposed to offer an objective view onto previously understudied challenges to the status quo, mounted by a few collectors by way of unique discursive practices and the establishment of distinctive single collection institutions, in the formative period for American art museums around the turn of the twentieth century in Philadelphia. The focus is on the two men's often shared, but eventually divergent, ideas pertaining to art and the public, which can be tracked to relevant discourses that informed those views.

At stake in this investigation is the relative tension between the agency of the collectors and the repurposing of their individual collections by future publics. More plainly, the goal is to study the interrelated narratives of collectors, Johnson and Barnes, as they unfolded over the course of the long twentieth century with an eye to what is gained or lost from the unraveling of the deliberate plans left by the collectors, which in both of these cases, included relocating the art work from the original site, leading to coincident shifts in the manner of display and targeted audience. It is not the point of this study to weigh-in on matters of justice regarding the individual cases, rather the goal is to probe the limits of an art collector's vision held against the dynamic needs of publics, and evaluate what this might mean for the twenty first century.

For Melissa and Cooper.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

My dissertation traces the rhetoric of two Philadelphians, attorney John G. Johnson and Dr. Albert C. Barnes, as they collected art with a specific public in mind, namely working Philadelphians around the turn of the twentieth century. Johnson famously left his collection of nearly 1,300 paintings, not to the art museum as a wealthy collector might, but to the “citizens of Philadelphia,” on the condition that the art remain on display in his home on South Broad Street for easier access. Barnes established an educational foundation around his collection of Post-Impressionist art for the purpose of educating “men and women who make their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores, and similar places.”¹

Juxtaposing Johnson and Barnes is based not merely on their identity as significant Philadelphia collectors, but on the fact that they shared a wealth of personal and professional connections. Both men had the same training in art education at Central High School in Philadelphia, established in 1836 as the first public school in the country with the specific mission to offer a quality education to working-class boys.² True to their

¹ Mary Ann Meyers, *Art, Education, & African-American Culture: Albert Barnes and the Science of Philanthropy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 66.

“...Ensure that it is the plain people...men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores and similar places, who shall have free access to the art gallery upon those days when the gallery is to be open to the public.” Elsewhere in a letter to Leopold Stokowski, Barnes wrote that he was interested in attracting a “plain, ordinary person, with little schooling...” Albert C. Barnes to Leopold Stokowski, March 18, 1925, ABC, Barnes.

² William Hafner Cornog, *School of the Republic, 1893-1943: A Half Century of the Central High School of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Alumni of Central High School, 1952); Franklin Spencer Edmonds, *History of the Central High School of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1902).

roots, throughout their lives as collectors, they proved sympathetic to the ideal of lifting up the public through cultural means and designed methods to achieve that goal.

A key feature of my dissertation is to foreground Johnson as Barnes' mentor. The historical span, from Johnson who started collecting in the 1880s through Barnes who begins around 1912, places these men within the context of what many have identified as a formative period for art institutions in America, bracketed in time by the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of World War I. During this period, Philadelphia saw a rise in art collectors from a new class of successful men who realized fortunes through effort rather than inheritance.

My method centers on networks, which connected fellow stakeholders engaged in the active exchange of discursive practices related to collecting and exhibiting art. To this end, I claim that Johnson and Barnes significantly contributed to framing nascent publics for viewing art in Philadelphia in the twentieth century. Considering the hundred-year unfolding of these narratives allows us to view the distance between the original vision of the collector and the reception of their collections today.

To connect my investigation to contemporary issues, I will then address shifting ideas of the public which occur when circumstances of exhibition and access changed over the course of the twentieth century contrary to each collector's specific intentions. Johnson's collection was moved from display in his home to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the 1930s, and then in the 1990s it was divided up and reinstalled throughout the Museum. The Barnes Collection was relocated from its original location in Merion, Pennsylvania and opened in Center City Philadelphia in 2012. These cases complicate the

matter of the public by raising issues of how collections of art objects originate in one time but endure through change to serve the demands of future publics.

Current Thinking on Dr. Barnes

The standard narrative of Dr. Albert C. Barnes, as art collector, opens with his appeal for guidance from American painter and high school chum, William Glackens. As it goes, after a crash-course in Modern art, Barnes sent his able tutor off to Paris in 1912 with \$20,000, and Glackens dutifully returned with paintings by Renoir, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Picasso, and dozens more, seeding the now multi-billion-dollar collection.³ It is widely agreed that, thereafter, Barnes made all buying decisions; yet in an interview thirty years later he insisted: “I never bought a painting under the advice of Glackens or any other person.”⁴ The tone of this comment is in line with the common perception of Barnes as arrogant, but in this instance it is something more. Rather than reading it as a slight to one of his few lifelong friends, it should be understood as a willful revision of history intended to bolster a key tenet of Barnes’ educational method for appreciating art—developing one’s own judgment.

There has been a growing conversation surrounding Dr. Barnes and his collection over the past two decades. Heretofore, much of the scholarship has understandably

³ For the most recent retelling of this narrative see: Stanley Meisler, “Say What They May, The Feisty Doctor Had an Artful Eye,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, v. 24, no. 2 (May, 1993): 96-98. In addition see the recent catalog of the Barnes Collection: Barnes Foundation, Judith F. Dolkart, and Martha Lucy, *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2012), 11.

⁴ Albert C. Barnes to Students at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, February 24, 1944, Fiske Kimball Correspondence 1923-1926, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. The letter countered the suggestion in a book by R. Sturgis Ingersoll on Henry McCarter that Barnes relied on the “advice of Glackens.”

focused on the dynamism of the man himself, the remarkable high quality of the paintings in the Collection, and controversies surrounding him and his art, including the posthumous and more recent relocating of the Collection fifteen miles from Merion, Pennsylvania to Center City Philadelphia. In the past ten years, once closely guarded and unexamined archival holdings have become increasingly available making possible more methodical works of scholarship including Mary Ann Meyers' *Art, Education, & African-American Culture: Albert Barnes and the Science of Philanthropy* (2004) and Neil Rudenstine's *The House of Barnes: The Man, the Collection, the Controversy* (2012). These texts testify to the shift in conversation, engaging more complex social and cultural issues related to the extraordinary history of the Barnes Collection, including the pivotal moment of its founding as an educational institution, Barnes' interest in African American culture, and its present reality of rebranding as a state-of-the-art twenty-first century museum.

Most recently, in fall of 2016, new Executive Director and President, Thomas Collins along with Martha Lucy, Deputy Director for Education & Public Programs and Curator, announced a commitment to expand Barnes' traditional educational approach and are reaching out to partner with area colleges.⁵ In the midst of all this, my project will reassess the traditional narrative of Barnes' development to examine his time as an art collector before reconnecting with Glackens, which has been mostly glossed over. I will

⁵ The Barnes Foundation issued a press release to announce a new expanded education program in fall of 2106 that "introduces new frameworks for art interpretation alongside original methodology." "Barnes Foundation Builds On Founding Vision With Expanded Education Program," Barnes Foundation, accessed June 1, 2017. <http://www.barnesfoundation.org/about/press/media-info/barnes-foundation-builds-on-founding-vision-with-expanded-education-program>

place Barnes within the context of a culture of collecting in Philadelphia and contribute a more complete account of his emergence as a collector. Along the way I will explore Barnes' regard for the manner of display of art and the make-up of the viewing public for his collection.

In the past decade, there has been much academic interest in studying the history of American collecting. The Center for the History of Collecting, a research institute of the Frick Art Reference Library, was founded in 2007. Scholars, including Anne Higonnet, Inge Reist, Esmée Quodbach, and Cynthia Saltzman, have written about the ballooning number of American collectors in the Gilded Age.⁶ Yet the narrative of American collecting tends to overlook Philadelphia, or frames it as a parochial city of patricians out of step with a modern metropolis like New York.⁷ This popular stereotype perpetuated in classic films such *The Philadelphia Story*, in which self-made man George Kittredge failed to make the grade in Philadelphia Main Line society endures, even though it topples under scrutiny. The Philadelphia Museum of Art was the product of a very active cadre of collectors around the turn of the twentieth century and remains the

⁶ To name a few of the more influential titles of the last ten years on this topic: Anne Higonnet, *A Museum of One's Own: Private Collecting, Public Gift* (Pittsburgh, PA: Periscope Pub, 2009); Esmee Quodbach, "The Last of the American Versailles": The Widener Collection at Lynnewood Hall," *Simiolus* Vol. 29 1/2 (2002): 42-96; Inge Jackson Reist and David Cannadine, *British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response: Reflections Across the Pond*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014); and Cynthia Saltzman, *Old Masters, New World: America's Raid on Europe's Great Pictures, 1880-World War I* (New York: Viking, 2008). See bibliography for more titles.

⁷ John Lukacs, *Philadelphia, Patricians & Philistines, 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), 5; E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class Authority and Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 31-34.

third largest museum in the country by holdings.⁸ While it is worth reconsidering Philadelphia's position in the history of modern art and culture more generally, my focus is squarely on art collectors, namely Johnson and Barnes, who brought world class art collections to the city Philadelphia.⁹

Despite the near universal respect of his accomplishments as a collector, widely read publications, with titles such as *The Devil and Dr. Barnes* (1987), reinforce the popular view of the collector as eccentric and difficult.¹⁰ This persisted throughout the well-publicized struggle over the relocation of the Barnes Collection with mention of Barnes in the media highlighting the colorful personality and notorious reputation of the man himself. Within the limited frame of mass media, the case of the Barnes has been treated as a soap opera, replete with scenes of wealth, power, and controversy, leaving aside important questions regarding its impact in the history of art and American culture more generally. This is done at the expense of more important matters of historical significance. For example, nearly every publication on Barnes recounts some version of his outrageous rejection of academics and art professionals; e.g. celebrated art historian Erwin Panofsky is reputed to have been repeatedly excluded until he snuck in disguised

⁸ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 224. Art historian Stephen Conn cites a quote from Eli K. Price, Vice President of the powerful Fairmount Park Commission in Philadelphia, "The object of a museum should be to encourage men who already have bought pictures to give them to the museum."

⁹ Lukacs compared the men in a single paragraph noticing their similar background, but concluded quickly that, "There *that* parallel ends. Johnson fitted into the society of Philadelphia. Barnes did not." A more typical mention of Johnson appears in studies of related collectors, such as in Esmee Quodbach's work on P.A.B. Widener.

¹⁰ Howard Greenfield, *The Devil and Dr. Barnes: Portrait of an American Art Collector* (Philadelphia, PA: Camino Books, 2005).

as a chauffeur, or T.S. Eliot turned down with a one word note, “nuts,” signed by Barnes’ dog Fidèle.¹¹

Although he expanded his collection over time to include art from all eras, in the second decade of the twentieth century, Barnes was one of a handful of visionary collectors, alongside John Quinn, Lillie Bliss, Duncan Phillips and others, who set out to amass an important collection of exclusively modern art and advocated for its place in established art museums, well before the founding of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City in 1929. Over the next century, MoMA would go on to control the narrative of Modern Art and institutionalize its display, and in the process dim the enduring glow of initial efforts of individual collectors including Barnes.¹² Before the controversy over the move, America had mostly forgotten Dr. Barnes long ago; outside of academia, even lifelong Philadelphians would have been hard-pressed to locate the Foundation without a map.

Barnes projected his vision for Modern art through frequent writings, in publications like *Arts and Decoration* and *American Art News*, in addition to active correspondence through letters, and sundry public actions, including appearances at lectures and interviews in the media. Most succinctly, in his Indenture of Trust, he specified his larger goal to use his collection to educate the working men and women of America.¹³ Other collectors, such as those mentioned above, advocated to expand the

¹¹ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 220; Meisler, “An Artful Eye,” 96.

¹² This topic has been widely written about. See: Kristina Wilson, *The Modern Eye: Stieglitz, MoMA, and the Art of the Exhibition, 1925-1934* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 97-107; Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 73-87.

¹³ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 66.

audience for Modern art, but did not specify an audience at all, let alone a specific segment.

Barnes defined his target population in social terms, pushing back against the prevailing audience for museums he viewed as privileged and interested only in amusement. He was imprecise on both accounts. His view of the public for the Philadelphia Museum of Art did not account for non-elites, while his view of the working class ignored the diversity within that broad economic group. Barnes was particularly critical of those who saw art as a means of entertainment. In terms of providing access to his collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art curator Fiske Kimball quotes Barnes, “The public, especially idle Philadelphian society, eager only for amusement, could whistle in the rain for admittance.”¹⁴ Despite his wealth, and his decision to establish his Foundation in one of the richest suburbs of Philadelphia, Barnes thought of himself as a different breed than his affluent neighbors on the Main Line, and those of other prominent neighborhoods such as Chestnut Hill and Rittenhouse Square. He was also wary of academics and students at nearby “elite” universities like Haverford College, Bryn Mawr College, and the University of Pennsylvania. The final iteration of the Foundation’s bylaws forever excluded any member of the board of trustees or the faculty from many area schools from serving on his Board, including Swarthmore College, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and surprisingly Temple University, whose populist mission should have appealed to him.¹⁵ Barnes assumed members of these sets came with

¹⁴ Fiske Kimball, “The Golden Age of Collecting,” Fiske Kimball Correspondence 1923-1926, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

¹⁵ Temple was founded in 1884 by Baptist Minister Russell Conwell who was sympathetic to the demands on working class Philadelphians without the time or money to enroll in college level courses. For Meyers, *Art, Education*, 282.

a false confidence stemming from cultural capital, a term fashioned by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to describe how “a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.”¹⁶ For Barnes, even these “experienced” viewers were unprepared to consider Modern art on its own terms, independent of preexisting knowledge. He was convinced it required a new way of looking at art.¹⁷ By this logic, everyone would need to be trained in how to approach and understand Modern art, unencumbered by entitlement, unburdened by standard narratives of art history, and willing to consider the objects and the relations between them anew. Art historian Jeremy Braddock notices that Barnes was not alone in this line of thinking; he refers to Barnes, Duncan Phillips, and others, as Modernist Collectors.¹⁸ Braddock signals that these collectors recognized that a paradigm shift was needed to properly attend to the exhibition of modern art and that “the modernist collection was a means of intervening in and reforming cultural practice.” The founding of the Barnes Foundation in 1922 as a new type of educational institution met this challenge.

¹⁶ Pierre, Bourdieu and Randal Johnson, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 7-8.

¹⁷ These changes have been widely theorized. See: Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990); Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity” in *Vision and Visuality, Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 3–23.

¹⁸ Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist Practice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 6. He writes, “as provisional institution, the modernist collection was a means of intervening in and reforming cultural practice, doing so on the basis of its form: the collection’s aesthetic arrangement, as well as its inclusions and exclusions, was a representation of ideological position.”

A Mentor for Dr. Barnes?

Admittedly, it is difficult to imagine Barnes' as mentee or protégé. In extant scholarship, Glackens and American philosopher John Dewey are discussed as friends not mentors.¹⁹ Such “friendships” feature prominently in biographies of collectors, where a trusted friend/advisor sets the collector on her path, as in the case of collector Isabella Stewart-Gardner and art historian Bernard Berenson.²⁰ But a mentor relationship connotes the informal sharing of a specific field of knowledge from a trusted expert, often from one generation to an eager member of another. This type of knowledge transfer figured prominently, and still does, in Johnson and Barnes' respective professional fields of law and medicine. Most biographical accounts characterize Barnes as fiercely self-reliant, supremely capable yet irascible, and thoroughly committed to the project of Modernism—collecting modern art, questioning tired dogma and accepted approaches to exhibition. Typologically, he fits the difficult genius paradigm of his day, as bombastic as Thomas Edison, as stubborn as Frank Lloyd Wright.

Despite his unfailing dedication to the project of Modernism, it is possible to trace the roots of Barnes' thinking as a collector to the discourse of the previous generation. The endless characterizations of Barnes' notorious *terribilità* have distracted scholars from serious consideration of his genesis as a collector. There has been insufficient attention given to Barnes' development before the originating moment with Glackens.

¹⁹ David Brownlee declares, without explanation that Dewey was a mentor to Barnes. Brownlee, David Bruce, and Derek Gillman, *The Barnes Foundation: Two Buildings, One Mission* (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli, In association with the Barnes Foundation, 2012), 1. And in some instances, ex-pat Leo Stein. See: Meyers, *Art, Education*, 31-37.

²⁰ For the story of their meeting and first purchases: Louise Hall Tharp, *Mrs. Jack; A Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), 129, 176-177; Saltzman, *Old Masters*, 58-60.

While much has been written about Barnes' correspondence with Leo Stein and Dewey, which in each case did not ensue until after he was established as a serious collector, scant attention has been given to those who came before, such as the seasoned collectors who played pivotal roles in his story, namely fellow Philadelphians, John G. Johnson and Peter A. B. Widener.²¹

Barnes encountered dozens of prominent collectors, at times actively seeking them out, as in the case of Stein and his sister Gertrude at their apartment in Paris in 1912.²² With a brilliant mind and a remarkable capacity to learn from others, he was known to have borrowed ideas freely from nearly everyone whom he felt had something of value to offer. However, Johnson and Widener are the most likely models as collectors, considering a host of key shared contact points.

John G. Johnson was raised in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia. His father was a blacksmith and his mother was a milliner. He was accepted into the competitive Central High School and went on to build a career as one of the most successful attorneys in the history of Philadelphia. Peter A. B. Widener was raised in Philadelphia. His father was a bricklayer. Widener became a butcher and eventually worked his way into politics first as a ward leader, then served on the board of education, and eventually became city treasurer. While owning a series of butcher shops throughout

²¹ For Widener: Martin Filler, "Victory," *New York Review of Books*, Volume 59 number 12 (July 12, 2012): 14. For Johnson: Judith F. Dolkart, "To See as the Artist Sees: Albert C. Barnes and the Experiment in Education" in *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks*, ed. Judith F. Dolkart and Martha Lucy (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2012), 10; Meyers, *Art, Education*, 27; John Anderson, *Art Held Hostage: The Battle Over the Barnes Collection* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 17-23; Lukacs, *Philistines*, 262.

²² Meyers, *Art, Education*, 31-32. While Gertrude would dismiss Barnes as a greedy millionaire, he and Leo, would remain in touch, despite their differences, for the rest of their lives. He would purchase a great deal of high quality works including Matisse's *Le Bonheur de Vivre* (1905-6) from Leo.

the city, he built a massive fortune by investing in and then controlling the streetcar system in Philadelphia and even expanded his interests to Chicago, Pittsburgh and Baltimore.

Johnson and Widener were close friends. Though Barnes was a generation younger than the two men, he came to know them both personally. When Barnes was a boy, his father was a butcher, and was friendly with Widener, which perhaps later earned the young Barnes an occasional seat at the legendary Saturday all-night poker game hosted in Widener's home.²³ It may have been around that table where he first met Johnson, whom he hired as his attorney in 1907 to settle a dispute with business partner Herman Hille over control of their lucrative drug Argyrol.²⁴ Barnes and Johnson remained in contact until the lawyer's death in 1917.

All three men were alumni of Central High School in Philadelphia, established in 1836 as the first public school in the country with the specific mission to offer a quality education to working-class boys.²⁵ I explore the curious case of Central High in chapter four, highlighting the distinctive system of arts education, which spawned an extraordinary number of art collectors and artists, most notably: Widener, Johnson,

²³ This is not a stretch. Barnes was a card player and he often claimed he earned a living gambling in the years between his studies at the University of Pennsylvania and his education in Germany. For the Saturday night poker game see: Quodbach, "Versailles," 48. Burton Jesse Hendrick, *The Age of Big Business; A Chronicle of the Captains of Industry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), 128. E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class Authority and Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 242. Peter Arrell Brown Widener, *Without Drums* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 18.

²⁴ The legal action resulted in Barnes buying out Hille to gain control over the disputed patent the following year.

²⁵ William Hafner Cornog, *School of the Republic, 1893-1943: A Half Century of the Central High School of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Alumni of Central High School, 1952); Franklin Spencer Edmonds, *History of the Central High School of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1902).

Barnes, Charles T. Yerkes, William Lukens Elkins, Thomas Eakins, John Sloan, and William Glackens.²⁶ A survey of alumni records from comparable institutions during the same time period, roughly 1850-1920, yields a more predictable distribution, e.g. the only standouts, who rose to prominence in the world of art at English High School in Boston and Central Grammar in Brooklyn were J.P. Morgan and Man Ray respectively.²⁷

Central High School in Philadelphia prepared young men to join the ranks of a burgeoning professional class. However, as many of them learned, their admirable accomplishments did not necessarily buy them access the most exclusive clubs or a place on the social register. Sociologist E. Digby Baltzell, in his book, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (1958), used the terms “elite” and “upper class” to explain this phenomenon, writing: “class is largely a matter of family, whereas an elite is largely a matter of individual achievement.”²⁸ In large cities all over America, these new elites flourished in a time of great economic expansion and opportunity in America between the Civil War and World War I, when diligence and prosperity could turn a family’s prospects in one generation. The situation was particularly poignant in the case of Philadelphia, which had a deeply entrenched

²⁶ There were other prominent alumni in the Philadelphia art world who are less well known nationally including: collectors Alba B. Johnson, John Frederick Lewis, and artists William Trost Richards and James Brade Sword et al.

²⁷ English High School Association, *One Hundred Years of the English High School of Boston* (Boston: Centenary Committee of the English High School Association, 1924); “Boys High School (Brooklyn),” Wikipedia, last modified November 24, 2015, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boys_High_School_\(Brooklyn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boys_High_School_(Brooklyn)).

²⁸ E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen; The Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1958), vi, 6-7.

hierarchy perpetuated by established families with distinguished lineages traced back to the founding of this nation.²⁹

Historian Sven Beckert claims that this shift in social roles was not inevitable, but one born of the actions of individuals.³⁰ In this new era rising professionals—Johnson the lawyer, Barnes the entrepreneurial doctor—increasingly moved in once exclusive and tightly managed social circles. Johnson rose from blacksmith’s son to leader of the Philadelphia Bar, along the way assembling a world-class art collection. He was invited into the Philadelphia Club in 1885, one of the most exclusive and oldest men’s clubs in the country, but this was only upon marrying Ida Powell, a widow with ties to established Philadelphia families.³¹ Johnson and Barnes were indifferent to the demands of high society, and with their different approaches, set their eyes on leaving personal collections to the citizens of Philadelphia.³² Widener was more typical of the new class of art collectors described by art historian John Ott as “entrepreneurial, industrial, corporate executives,” out for prestige, determined to leave their collections to their heirs or large museums around the turn of the twentieth century.³³ Yet Widener’s sons were still

²⁹ For a social history of this crucial period see: Nathaniel Burt and Wallace E. Davies, “The Iron Age, 1876-1905,” in *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, ed. Russell Frank Weigley, et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 520-523.

³⁰ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9.

³¹ For Powell: Barnie F. Winkelman, *John G. Johnson: Lawyer and Art Collector 1841-1917* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942), 93-96. For Philadelphia Club: Baltzell, *Gentleman*, 348-350.

³² Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 70-75. Beckert addresses the newly rich’s sense of stewardship towards urban poor.

³³ John Ott, *Manufacturing the Modern Patron in Victorian California: Cultural Philanthropy, Industrial Capital, and Social Authority* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 7. It should be noted that Baltzell writes “Widener cared little for fashionable society,” noting that he built his mansion north of Market Street far away from Rittenhouse Square society. Baltzell, *Puritan*, 242.

frustrated by being denied the full embrace of Philadelphia society and his grandson George was the first of the family to be accepted to the Philadelphia club.³⁴

These men built impressive fortunes in their lifetimes, which made art collecting a possibility. Widener was the richest Philadelphian by far. According to Michael Klepper and Robert Gunther's 1996 listing of the wealthiest Americans in history, Widener ranks twenty-seventh, just behind J.P. Morgan and Henry Clay Frick, amassing the modern equivalent of \$32 billion.³⁵ Comparatively, Barnes does not even come close to making the list, having sold his business in 1929 for a reported \$6 million, the equivalent to roughly \$80 million today. And finally Johnson, who was one of the first attorneys to earn \$500,000 on a single case, was a distant third leaving behind a collection estimated at his death a mere \$4.4 million, roughly \$60 million today.³⁶

Each man spent a fortune buying art and established a mansion suitable for display of his collection. Historical circumstances favored them, as a vibrant trade was opening for European paintings.³⁷ Johnson began collecting in the 1880s and may have encouraged his friend Widener to do so, as he also began buying in this decade. Barnes began in the first decades of the twentieth century. All three men began buying Barbizon school paintings, but soon developed their own interests. Johnson pursued in representative examples from the various schools of European painting, such as Dutch landscapes, early Italian Primitives, etc. Widener was after big game—Rembrandts and

³⁴ Baltzell, *Gentleman*, 165; Baltzell, *Puritan*, 242.

³⁵ Michael M. Klepper, and Robert E. Gunther, *The Wealthy 100: From Benjamin Franklin to Bill Gates- A Ranking of the Richest Americans, Past and Present* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1996.) Robert R. Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer: A History, 1735-1945* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992), 191.

³⁶ "John G. Johnson Noted Lawyer, Dies," *New York Times Obituary*, April 15, 1917.

³⁷ This has been documented in many histories of collecting. The rise of the American collector at Europe's expense is detailed in: Saltzman, *Old Masters*, 213-230.

masterpieces of the highest quality—regardless of price. Barnes would make his reputation collecting the work of living modern artists, such as Renoir, and Matisse. Johnson purchased a large red brick mansion on South Broad Street. He willed his entire collection of 1,279 paintings to the citizens of Philadelphia and deemed that they should be on view to the public in his home. Barnes built himself a mansion made of imported French limestone that would house both his foundation and his home. Widener built Lynnewood Hall, a Neoclassical Revival mansion in Elkins Park, which was called the Last American Versailles. It housed his art collection but was not opened to the public. Many scholars, including Calvin Tomkins in *Merchants and Masterpieces* (1989) and Dianne Sachko Macleod in *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects* (2008), have written about art collecting as a common avocation of newly moneyed Americans out for status and/or diversion around the turn of the twentieth century. Prior still, Aline Saarinen in *Proud Possessors* (1958) set the tone for considering art collecting as a social activity, chosen by individuals with outsized disposable income over thoroughbreds or fine wine, and sometimes in addition to, as in the case of Joseph Early Widener.³⁸

All three men earned their way in a newly thriving urban commercial setting and it is likely, at least in part, they took pride in collecting as just spoils of hard work. As such, they were not entirely immune to economist Thorsten Veblen's "conspicuous

³⁸ Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum, *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970); Aline B. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, 1958.)

consumption,” namely spending money on luxury goods as a display of wealth.³⁹ While that may be as true for Johnson and Barnes as for any of the others, such as Widener, Frick, and Morgan, they stand apart from their peers in two basic ways. They were compelled to collect out of a desire for knowledge and with a view to a specific public purpose. My positioning of Johnson and Barnes does not discount the commitment or seriousness of others, or diminish the validity of their varied approaches. Higonnet is helpful here, as she has complicated familiar descriptions of “robber baron collectors,” casting doubt on pop-psychological explanations of their motives, e.g. Frick left a collection behind to distract us from his misdeeds in the world of business.⁴⁰ Yet it remains true by and large that this group did not engage with the public by way of writings of art criticism, alternative schemes of exhibition and display, or detailed plans for a legacy institution.⁴¹

Upon his death in 1915, Widener left behind a grand mansion, Lynnewood Hall, and despite the fact that he had been rumored to leave his art collection to the soon-to-be-built Philadelphia Museum of Art, he offered limited insight related to a public for his collection. According to Esmée Quodbach, Assistant Director of the Center for the History of Collecting at the Frick Collection, the will granted Widener’s son Joseph “power of appointment to sell the Widener Collection to enrich the family estate, or to

³⁹ Quodbach, “Versailles,” 50. According to Quodbach, “Widener initially probably conceived of his collection as a proclamation of his hard-won status rather than as a source of aesthetic or intellectual pleasure.” Veblen, Thorstein Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 27-29. For a cogent summary of Veblen’s theory see: Andrew B. Trigg, “Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption,” *Journal of Economic Issues* Vol. 35, No. 1 (Mar., 2001): 100-101.

⁴⁰ Higonnet, *A Museum*, 124.

⁴¹ By this standard alone other collectors might be said to stand in the company of Johnson and Barnes, such as Duncan Phillips, while Isabella Stewart Gardner and Henry Clay Frick who did not publish would not.

donate it.”⁴² On the few occasions that Widener has been compared to Johnson, the focus has been on the process of collecting. In a 1930 travel journal, Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith claims that while the Widener collection is “a collection of pictures bought for the pleasure of the buyer and hung for the embellishment of his home,” the Johnson Collection “represents the intelligent selection and personal hunting of a real lover of painting with an independent taste of his own.”⁴³ Along the same lines, art historian Peter Sutton refers to Johnson in comparison to Widener, as “an alternative to the masterpiece gatherer.”⁴⁴ Arrell Widener sums up this key difference in approach in his memoir,

Without Drums:

Mr. Johnson had been the first to interest Grandfather in art; he guided him in many of his early purchases. Yet later their approach to art was from opposite poles, and the Saturday night art discussion often ended in a heated argument between Grandfather and Mr. Johnson...Grandfather wanted only the finest works of an individual artist. Mr. Johnson bought a picture because some one feature of it appealed to him.⁴⁵

⁴² Quodbach, “Versailles,” 88. The collection could be left “to any museum now or hereafter established in the City of Philadelphia, the City of Washington, or the City of New York.” Quodbach, 42, Between 1915-1940, Joseph opened the collection, at Lynnewood Hall in Elkins Park to the public by appointment during the summer months. Joseph chose to maintain the Collection and continued to expand it, making purchases until 1925. It was his son, Arrell Widener, who eventually oversaw its transition to the National Gallery in Washington in 1940.

⁴³ Roger Hinks and Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith, *Pictures And People: A Transatlantic Criss-Cross Between Roger Hinks In London And Naomi Royde-Smith (Mrs. Ernest Milton) In New York, Boston, Philadelphia During The Months Of January, February, March In The Year 1930* (London: Gollancz, 1930), 167.

⁴⁴ Peter Sutton, “A Taste for Dutch Art,” in *Holland's Golden Age in America: Collecting the Art of Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Hals*, ed. Esmée Quodbach (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014): 10. Roger Fry echoed similar sentiments in his memorial to Johnson in *Burlington Magazine*. Roger E. Fry, “Mr. John G. Johnson of Philadelphia” *The Burlington Magazine* (May 1917): 203-4.

⁴⁵ Widener, *Without Drums*, 18.

Across extant scholarship, there seems to be an implicit critique that, compared to Johnson, Widener was a lesser collector, an American tycoon, little concerned with developing a specific collection for a specific audience, even himself. This clumsy, but enduring, binary of very wealthy uninformed masterpiece collector/less wealthy informed sincere collector is far from nuanced with the truth somewhere in between the two poles. Over time Widener developed an eye for great art and fought alongside Johnson on the Art Committee of Fairmount Park in public discussions related to the building of what was to become the Philadelphia Museum of Art. And while Johnson's wariness regarding masterpieces is supported by a passage in his first (and only) work of art criticism, *Sight-Seeing in Berlin and Holland Among Pictures* (1892), where he cautions would-be collectors about "collecting names over works of art," it is also true that the constraints of his budget limited what he could pursue in the marketplace.⁴⁶ One can find evidence that Johnson was not immune to the lure of acquiring masterpieces, although his stated goal was otherwise. For example, in a letter to Berenson, Johnson inquired after Raphael's *Small Cowper Madonna*, which was eventually purchased by Widener for \$565,000.⁴⁷ To further this point, Quodbach, and others, notice the fact that Johnson owned nine Rembrandts, which were widely sought out at that time, despite the fact that eight of the nine would later be attributed to others.⁴⁸

In the end, Widener's interests extended past the world of fine art and understandably his vision for art collecting and exhibiting is less developed. Therefore, I will focus on the relationship between Johnson and Barnes, expanding on Meyers'

⁴⁶ John G. Johnson, *Sight-Seeing in Berlin and Holland Among Pictures* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott's, 1892), 24.

⁴⁷ Saarinen, *Possessors*, 82-83, Quodbach, *Versailles*, 87.

⁴⁸ Quodbach, *Versailles*, 51.

suggestion that “Johnson may well have shared with his young friend the joy he found in intelligent collecting”⁴⁹ to demonstrate how Johnson was a mentor to Barnes.

Overlapping Networks

The shared approach to collecting of Johnson and Barnes centered on perfecting one’s own judgment. In matters of culture they were steadfast autodidacts; they knew how to acquire knowledge and had many tutors along the way. Johnson, as an attorney might, enlisted the consensus of a cadre of top advisors with whom he was not afraid to trade opinions and question, including, Fry, Berenson, Wilhelm Valentiner, and others. Barnes’ critical eye was cultivated in concert with Glackens, Stein, and dealers Paul Durand-Ruel and Paul Guillaume.

Their ideas about collecting can be gleaned from public writings. Legal documents related to the dispersal of their respective estates highlight their attempts to control the staging of their art to the public in precise detail, rather than leaving their life’s work in the hands of surviving relatives or city bureaucrats. In practical terms, Johnson’s legal training informed his thinking, while Barnes, after witnessing repeated challenges to his mentors’ explicit intentions by Philadelphia politicians almost immediately after the bequest was granted, must have appreciated the need to be even more diligent in crafting his estate.

In line with Jürgen Habermas’ characterization of museum spaces, the two collectors were attempting to organize the experience of art for the viewer.⁵⁰ Johnson’s

⁴⁹ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 17.

target audience was very broadly conceived as “the citizens of Philadelphia.” Regarding matters of display, he included general recommendations in his Will of galleries he admired. It was paramount that the works remain in his home, which he felt was in a neighborhood accessible to the average Philadelphian. In addition, his collection was to be displayed as a totality, rather than separating out the better quality works, as might be done at a major museum. His overarching goal was to showcase a history of various schools of European art from the previous four centuries. His plan generated controversy with city politicians due to the perceived unsuitability of his home to properly display art and what they considered its unfashionable location at the south end of Broad Street, especially considering they were planning a city museum at the other end of town and were sorely in need of high quality works of art.

Barnes wished to reach the working people of Philadelphia, but with the caveat that they use his collection to study art, not merely be entertained by it. He was much more precise regarding matters of exhibition. Like Johnson, he eschewed the more traditional museum taxonomy and joined contemporaries in the midst of actively rethinking the exhibition of paintings. He had firsthand experience in the different iterations of Alfred Stieglitz’s galleries, the Armory Show, and even in his rival Phillips’ galleries. Barnes introduced what he called “ensembles,” which arranged works of art not

⁵⁰ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 40. “Like the concert and the theater, museums institutionalized the lay judgment of art: discussion became the medium through which people appropriated art.”

according to traditional categories of style, chronology or region, but on formal properties and principles of design.⁵¹

By 1912, the year Barnes began “seriously collecting,” the two men had already known each other for five years.⁵² In June of that year, Barnes wrote to Johnson for advice on making an eventual bequest: “It is my wish to have these [paintings] made a separate part of my estate, to be given to the city in a way that the best use would be made of them.”⁵³ Other letters followed, but from this point forward the two men exchanged views in person. Johnson was known to hold court on Sunday afternoons, discussing his paintings before invited guests. His letters testify to countless invitations and mentions of these visits. He would have individual paintings brought to the main room and set on an easel to facilitate discussion. There are even accounts describing him actively moving about, troubling over the arrangement and proper lighting of objects on the wall; on both accounts Barnes surely took note.⁵⁴ They knew each other for ten years before Johnson’s death in 1917. Johnson’s experience helped Barnes to imagine a pathway forward.

For many of the collectors of the Gilded Age, wealth afforded the opportunity to study and to travel. They were unique in the sense that most did not care to spend time developing the judgment of a connoisseur; it was more practical, especially for those

⁵¹ Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Abrams, 1994); Ian Dunlop, *The Shock of the New: Seven Historic Exhibitions of Modern Art* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972); Wilson, *The Modern Eye*.

⁵² This term is used by Meyers and will be unpacked in Chapter Three.

⁵³ Barnes to Johnson, June 22, 1912, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence, Barnes Foundation, Archives.

⁵⁴ Winkelman, *Johnson*, 163,166. See also: Lloyd DeWitt, “They Leave Us As They Find Us, They Never Elevate”: John G. Johnson and the Dutch Masters,” in *Holland's Golden Age in America*, ed. by Esmée Quodbach (The Frick Collection; University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press2014), 91.

accustomed to running a business, to leave it to the experts.⁵⁵ But Johnson and Barnes were professionals, with the advantage of rigorous training in reading and writing, not to mention a solid foundation in art appreciation at Central High School. They developed their skills further through their respective professional training, unlike Widener who, despite having gone to Central High, was a butcher turned businessman and not a professional turned businessman like Barnes.

These men relied on connections made through existing networks that linked them socially to professional organizations, alumni groups, social clubs, and the like. These networks are inherently social and in the late nineteenth century were replacing the aristocratic model wed to birthright and privilege. Networks are not to be thought of as structures, but as connections between people. They are not necessarily private, but they tend to be more defined and contained. Art collectors and publics associate in open forums, including, but not limited to: museums, galleries, auction houses, lectures, exhibitions, and attendant printed media, such as magazines, journals, newspapers, and online forums. Simply by means of their participation in these settings, individuals contribute to a definable discourse by responding to the experience of art and engaging in discussion with others.⁵⁶ Publics interested in fine art, comprised of collectors,

⁵⁵ It was said of the voracious collector Henry Clay Frick, “he had no instinct for books or learning...” Attributed to employee of Frick’s James H. Bridge, quoted in Saltzman, *Old Masters*, 148.

⁵⁶ My conception of the public ultimately traces back to Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), by way of the work of both Nancy Fraser, *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy* (Milwaukee, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Center for Twentieth Century Studies, 1990), and Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), who stretched Habermas’ ideas about the public sphere to address the idea of multiple publics, and applied the theory to cultural matters.

academics, museumgoers, dealers, connoisseurs, art critics, students, artists, patrons, art educators, writers, bureaucrats, and others, blossomed in the historical space between the Civil War and the Second World War. This was due to an emerging wealthy class of businesspersons and professionals in the Gilded Age, as well as the increased interest in the role of arts institutions and national identity.⁵⁷ In many cases, these seminal publics, in dynamic tension with more recent ones formed in the second half of the twentieth century, continue to shape discourse surrounding the display and appreciation of art in America today.

In Chapters Two and Three on Johnson and Barnes respectively, I will chart their development as collectors, using the idea of networks to organize the roots of their thinking about collecting. They networked by way of new forms of media, which facilitated low-cost communication, like the telegram, and the increasing availability of specialized publications by way of the exponential increase in available printed material.⁵⁸ Changes in the field of print have an agency of their own as they effectively reorient discourse toward the exchange of ideas through articles, journals, books, and printed materials, making possible the type of “imagined communities” of people that will never meet, across time and place, theorized by Benedict Anderson.⁵⁹ In addition,

⁵⁷ See: Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 47-49. David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 41-42. Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 2007), 21-47. Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism: The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in the United States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 9-11. Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction*, 73-87.

⁵⁸ Lucien Febvre, Henri-Jean Martin, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, and David Wootton, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800* (London: Verso, 2010).

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

there was a great increase in the number of art galleries, museums, and art exhibitions, in American cities, as well as blockbuster exhibitions from the 1876 Centennial to the 1913 Armory Show. Once outside the structure of the networks they would engage others by discursive means, e.g. publishing art criticism or catalogs, exhibiting art, etc., and invite participation from new publics.

Johnson and Barnes were part of a trend around the turn of the twentieth century as individuals created their own “collection museums.” According to Higonnet, this practice was in reaction to the forming of large national museums in major cities throughout the United States, with their “exhausting expanses and clinically sorted galleries.”⁶⁰ The formation of museums in city centers was part of the City Beautiful Movement that built up urban centers as places of culture. This would lead to active economic and social centers that set the model for civic life into the twentieth century. Pushing against this trend, Johnson and Barnes were in step with Isabella Stewart Gardner, Frick, and many others, who envisioned collection museums of their own where all objects were meant to remain together and be displayed as arranged in their original setting. However, in this dissertation it will become clear that by way of specific discursive actions—engaging the public, designing a deliberate collection, taking exhibition seriously, and leaving a detailed bequest with a public in mind—Johnson and Barnes were able to craft a vision of a collection in order to engage with specific publics, different from the cultural rhetoric espoused by the more typical American collectors regarding the virtue of collecting for the public. Together Johnson and Barnes played a

⁶⁰ Higonnet, *A Museum*, xii-xiii.

pivotal role in shaping a prescribed public for art in Philadelphia in the first half of the twentieth century.

Despite their shared humble beginnings, and their desire to engage “ordinary” citizens, they did not espouse typically populist rhetoric. Their approach was more meritocratic, in that they hoped visitors, regardless of socio-economic status, would be rewarded if they were willing to put in the time required to appreciate art. Their legacy institutions were designed to facilitate this practice. Yet even their more targeted conceptions of the public are still rather vague and demand investigation and further explanation, which will be done in detail in Chapter Five. This uncertainty regarding the make-up of the public anticipates the problem noticed later in the century by theorist Stuart Hall about making a clear distinction between the culture of the people and the elite. Both collectors designed institutions that go against the dictates of the dominant culture by shaping alternatives to the prevailing model of large city museums, which, despite being public institutions, aligned closely with the interests of the upper class. By targeting ordinary citizens, however, they risked falling prey to what Hall calls paternalism: “One way or another, ‘the people’ are frequently the object of reform: often, for their own good, of course—in their best interests.”⁶¹ As will be discussed in chapter four, the motivation of our collectors must be understood not in isolation, but as part of a broader moral crusade at the turn of the twentieth century to educate the poor and ultimately uplift all citizens. Theoretically, both men read books by John Ruskin, who praised the merits of the Working Men’s College in England. They also might have known of Mechanic’s Institutes in England dedicated to adult learning. In America, there

⁶¹ Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. by Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 443.

is the example between 1912 and 1932 of the over 5,000 schools in the American South promoted by Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald to educate poor African Americans.

There is a strong assumption today that a museum's primary mission is to educate. Critics, like Tony Bennett, wary of museum education outreach initiatives as a manifestation of cultural hegemony inherent in institutional approaches to art education, writes in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1995) that late nineteenth-century museums may have been "intended for the people, but were not of the people in the sense of displaying any interest in the lives, habits, and customs of either the contemporary working classes or the laboring classes of pre-industrial societies."⁶² This type of institutional critique emphasizes collectors' position between the public and works of art as mediators who determine what and how art is shown, affecting its reception.

It is possible that their shared working class background kept them mindful of some debt to be repaid to the working class. But this would be against the trend described by Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum in *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (2010), in which wealthy Americans, despite their tacit support of educational programs, were focused on matters of harnessing the forces of culture to help them to forge a "common bourgeois identity."⁶³ Both Johnson and Barnes rejected social obligations and matters of status more generally and thus showed little to no interest in their lives in cultivating anything resembling this.

⁶² Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995) 109.

⁶³ Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum, *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 2.

Considering Publics

In addition to the issue of mentoring, this study will contextualize parallel changes to the Johnson and Barnes collections in their respective histories. Taking a cue from Bronwen Wilson and Edward Yachnin's *Making Publics* project, I will consider how individual and collective social actors created new forms of public discourse.⁶⁴ This extends beyond the collectors and the publics that formed around their institutions to include future groups that are constantly evolving in their interests and desires. Theorist Michael Warner reminds us, "museum exhibitions are a form of public discourse."⁶⁵ In particular, a collection museum reorients discourse on art towards matters of display, cohesiveness, pedagogy, value, narrative, taste, ownership, and citizenship. Discourse is dynamic, constantly being made and remade. Collectors are active, if unintentional, agents in shaping publics by means of assembling works of art, exhibiting their collections in specific ways, and securing their legacy through display. New publics react to what is put forth and through their response shape it further.

After being displayed in his home for a limited time in the 1920s, Johnson's collection was first moved to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, on temporary loan in the 1930s and installed permanently against his wishes by 1942. Paintings from the collection were displayed in twelve separate galleries dedicated to the John G. Johnson Collection. Then, in the 1990s, after another successful legal challenge to the stipulations of his Will, paintings from the Collection were reinstalled throughout the Philadelphia

⁶⁴ Bronwen Wilson and Paul Edward Yachnin, *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.

⁶⁵ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 72.

Museum of Art alongside all other European art holdings. In this way, Johnson's Collection became indistinguishable from gifts from all other donors or museum acquisitions. This further buried his legacy despite the occasional special exhibition now and again. The tax-free status of the Barnes Foundation was challenged in the courts throughout the twentieth century. At issue was that Barnes did not allow the public into his galleries, except those who enrolled in classes. The founding document known as the Indenture of Trust did stipulate that after Barnes' and his wife Laura's deaths the public would be granted free access on days when classes were not held. In 1961, however, five years before Laura died, persistent legal challenges resulted in the courts mandating the opening of the galleries to the public. While only two days for a few hours each week, which left the rest of the week for the educational programs. Then, notoriously, at the end of the century steps were taken to eventually move the Collection to Center City Philadelphia. At this point, like any twenty-first century museum, the Barnes Collection is open to the public, for a market-rate entrance fee, hardly free, on a customary six-day museum schedule. Classes are still held Tuesdays and in the evenings when the general museum is closed. With his original method obscured, the apparition of Dr. Barnes looms in the galleries as one more eccentric American millionaire, rather than a visionary educator. The current leadership at the Barnes Foundation is working to remedy this injustice, and has simultaneously expanded the offering of courses beyond his method to include courses with a more traditional art historical approach.

Sundry talking heads in the 2009 documentary, *The Art of the Steal*, which rather heavy-handedly chronicles the unjust nature of the move, claim the saga of Johnson's bequest as precedent for the "stealing" of the Barnes Collection to Center City

Philadelphia. While I am not convinced that the Johnson case is a direct parallel, both narratives hinge on interpreting the intentions of the collectors regarding the eventual display for the public. Both men had their intentions cast aside by newly formed groups with their own interests. The analogous denouement invites many questions, such as: Once a bequest has been made, should the public right to view paintings of shared cultural value ever override the intentions of the benefactor? To what extent should the public dictate the terms of access to privately assembled art collections, which benefit from public funding? Who comprises the public? Who decides?

Layout of the Dissertation

In Chapter Two I will make a case for how John G. Johnson became a different sort of collector. I will privilege key moments and experiences in his life's story as significant to this particular aspect of his development. I will look to how he leveraged networks to become an accomplished collector, particularly in terms of whom he interacted with and what sources he was reading.

In the same manner, in Chapter Three, I will trace Barnes' beginnings as a collector in an attempt to push back to before he works with Glackens. I will explore the roots of his ideas about art and the public by claiming that his early period, including first meeting Johnson, helped him to establish a solid foundation as a collector and left him open to new ideas like those of John Dewey in the next decade. I will investigate key moments in his development and considering the importance of his use of networks.

In Chapter Four I argue that Johnson and Barnes shared an approach to collecting. I will not engage in comparative biography, but will draw the two men together to make a

strong case for a certain shared cast of mind. This will be done by identifying and explaining a series of dispositions and discursive practices that the two men shared, which set them apart from other collectors in their day. In addition, I will describe the importance of their shared experience within a few square miles of Center City Philadelphia in the opening decades of the twentieth century, and how this location at that particular moment in history was a fortuitous launching pad in their success.

In Chapter Five, I will conclude by aligning the activity of these two overlooked Philadelphia collectors in order to better understand how an art viewing public, or publics, were shaped as a result of the agency and corresponding legacies of these men. I will consider the case studies of what happened to their respective collections over the course of the long twentieth century, with an eye on how the needs of shifting publics altered their vision as collectors. I will track each man's ideas about art and the public. For Johnson, I will look to his public writings and his will. For Barnes, I will trace theories of art education and the public from his early writings through his connection with John Dewey, who was instrumental in the development of the Barnes Foundation.

CHAPTER 2
JOHN G. JOHNSON: THE MAKING OF A COLLECTOR

John G. Johnson was an important collector. There is little need to “rediscover” Johnson; he has been in plain view as one of several prominent Philadelphia art collectors from the Gilded Age. But he has been mostly overlooked in the history of American collecting and this chapter will consider some of the reasons why. Much of what is known about Johnson as a collector stems from two mid-twentieth century sources, *Barnie Winkelman’s John G. Johnson* (1942), and *Aline Saarinen’s The Proud Possessors* (1958).⁶⁶ These focus heavily on Johnson’s biography and set the basic narrative arc of his career as a collector. More recently, Lloyd DeWitt’s essay, “They Leave Us As They Find Us, They Never Elevate,” from the exhibition catalog, *Holland’s Golden Age in America* (2014), offers an updated account of Johnson as a collector, as one who stood apart from his peers. According to DeWitt,

[Johnson] educated himself in art history and came to be regarded as a museum man by museum men. As a collector he worked like a sniper who sought opportunity and relied on his own judgment, patience, and the exercise of caution.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Aline B. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959), 92-117. In addition, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which houses the Johnson Collection, has staged exhibitions highlighting the collecting, the most recent, October 2017.

⁶⁷ Lloyd DeWitt, “They Leave Us As They Find Us, They Never Elevate”: John G. Johnson and the Dutch Masters,” in *Holland’s Golden Age in America*, ed. by Esmée Quodbach (The Frick Collection; University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014). The Philadelphia Museum of Art will celebrate Johnson as collector in a retrospective “Old Masters Now,” in the fall of 2017.

I will build on this current thinking to address how he developed as a collector, and to map out networks of individuals and sundry experiences that contributed to his ideas on collecting.

My method highlights the evolving nature of public discourse; therefore I will illuminate the diverse networks of collectors, scholars, dealers, social relations, professional contacts, and high school alumni, among others, which facilitated Johnson's process of becoming a key player in the art world. Ultimately, he leveraged experiences from interacting within these networks to make public contributions by way of buying and trading paintings for himself and others, writing a work of art criticism, displaying his works in public settings, advising fellow collectors, serving on prominent boards of arts institutions, and bequeathing his collection for use by the citizens of Philadelphia.

Johnson emerged at the right time to become a world-class art collector in the United States, coming of age in the second half of the nineteenth century when American collectors were laying the groundwork for the future. New opportunities opened in the art market as European aristocrats were selling off family art collections under the pressure of changing economic times. Wealthy Americans sought new models for displaying art to the public, such as the founding of the Wallace Collection, the original "collection museum," which was gifted to the nation of Great Britain in 1897.

Johnson was born in Philadelphia in 1841. He was raised in the Chestnut Hill section of the city where his father was the local blacksmith. With the encouragement of his mother, he passed the entrance exam to Central High School at age twelve and went on to graduate in 1857 near the top of his class. After clerking the offices of Benjamin Rush and the William F. Judson, he passed the bar exam in 1863. He then set about

building a successful law practice. He gained great renown in the area of corporate and trust law. By the early twentieth century, his clients included the Sugar Trust, Northern Securities Company, Amalgamated Copper Company, the Pennsylvania Railroad, the New York Central Railroad, United States Steel, American Distilleries, and he was retained by between sixty to eighty banks.⁶⁸ In 1875 he married Ida Powell, the widow of one of his clients. They did not have any children together, but raised her three in their house on 506 South Broad Street.

Johnson's particular set of skills matched opportunities in the nascent world of art collecting on this side of the Atlantic; he was a well-educated professional, with superior critical thinking skills, he possessed a disciplined and open mind, had lavish disposable income through his law practice, and had the opportunity to travel beginning in the late 1870s. He would set aside the summer months when the courts were closed to travel to Europe to attend art exhibitions and shop for paintings. He was both driven and qualified to engage with emerging discursive practices around the display and appreciation of art. He read voraciously, judging from his vast library of art journals, books, and auction catalogs. He consulted and maintained contact with many prominent art experts and over time others sought his advice on art matters. Johnson was a "public man" in the sense that Richard Sennett has written about, not an anonymous individual actor in the public sphere, but a man fully engaged with his fellow citizens. Johnson is defined by the rich life outside of the walls of his home; he forged his legacy in the secular urban environment of Philadelphia.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Robert R. Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer: A History, 1735-1945* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992), 179.

⁶⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

As a lawyer, Johnson was a member of an emergent professional class still defining itself in relation to established tradition. He was part of a generation who improvised a new status in old Philadelphia, based on merit and achievement in a profession rather than on inherited wealth or social privilege (beyond the very real advantage of being a white non-immigrant male in late nineteenth century America). He was a modern man capable of moving between the established world of the Philadelphia Club and the bawdy world of a late-night poker game. His hard-earned fortune freed him to pursue his interest in collecting and he did so free from any social obligations or social register. According to Winkelman, Johnson was “definitely not a club man” and left socializing to his wife, while he retired to his study, or to sit amongst his paintings.⁷⁰

Introduction

John G. Johnson’s modest profile was largely the result of his own efforts. During his lifetime, he effectively eluded the spotlight such that in his obituary, the *New York Times* reported: “[Johnson], the greatest lawyer in the English-speaking world, was probably less known to the general public in proportion to his importance than any other man in the United States.”⁷¹ Today he remains relatively unknown despite his historic achievements as an attorney. Johnson tried 168 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, declined nominations to that court from two presidents, and turned down the position of attorney general from a third. As a corporate lawyer, around the turn of the twentieth century, he was involved with virtually every important antitrust case in the United States. Johnson’s clients were the most formidable businessmen of the Gilded Age:

⁷⁰ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 136.

⁷¹ “John G. Johnson, Noted Lawyer Dies,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1917.

Henry O. Havemeyer, J. P. Morgan, Henry Clay Frick, and Peter A. B. Widener. They also comprised his peer group of art collectors.

He chose work over notoriety and avoided the press. For example, when *Who's Who* courted him for their publication, he refused twice, politely, but dismissed them the third time, brusquely: "I never care to see my name figure in any publication."⁷² He controlled his public image so carefully that he even restricted his sole portrait photographer, Haeseler Studio in Philadelphia, from sharing his image during his lifetime.⁷³

After death, the undoing of his short-lived "collection museum" in his home on South Broad Street further obscured the collector's legacy. Johnson's house museum, along with the details of his bequest, and his role in shaping publics will be discussed in Chapter Five. Johnson's Will bequeathed his collection of paintings to the citizens of Philadelphia, but within twenty years the entire collection would be reinstalled in a separate wing of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, labeled "The John G. Johnson Collection." In this way, Johnson was relegated to just another collector amongst dozens that comprise the permanent collection, including William L. Elkins, George W. Elkins and John D. McIlhenny.

Johnson was a serious professional in great demand. He had limitless energy and was happily consumed by his law practice. He was an imposing and uncompromising

⁷² Allison Gray, "Picking People for Who's Who," *The American Magazine* 91 (1921): 77-78.

⁷³ Johnson requested that no photographs of him be given out or negatives made public during his lifetime. His photograph was released in a limited capacity in consultation with his family and law associates after his death. "Conrad Haeseler to J.A. Myers, Secretary of Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, January 14, 1918," John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

man who maintained a daily regimen worthy of Ben Franklin. Evenings were for reading and correspondence, and considering the stacks of letters he left behind relating merely to art collecting, one wonders when he slept. Remarkably, along the way, he made time to educate himself on painting and collecting.

He vigilantly guarded his time from those who would waste it. This is a constant theme that runs through his personal letters. In the last decade of his life, he wrote to one of his art advisors, Bernard Berenson, “to my great regret, the [ocean liner] Amerika will be full of people I know, some of whom will bore me to death.”⁷⁴ “There are lots of Philadelphians here, especially in this Hotel. . . none tempting as companions. Luckily, my sitting room is so cozy that I need not stumble across them.”⁷⁵ Despite a reputation as tough customer, which might have been the afterglow of a carefully crafted curmudgeonly façade that proved useful in his trade, those who knew him well often referred to him as “good natured” and even kind.⁷⁶ Even the often-solitary act of collecting is highlighted by travel with friends, such as Peter A. B. Widener, Wilhelm von Bode, R. Langston Douglas, and Wilhelm Valentiner.⁷⁷ His letters reveal a long trail of invites to dinner at his home on Saturdays, and Sunday afternoons in conversation

⁷⁴ Johnson to Berenson, July 10, 1912, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

⁷⁵ Johnson to Berenson, August 18, 1909, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

⁷⁶ George Washington Norris, *Ended Episodes* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937).

⁷⁷ Johnson to Valentiner, April 20, 1909,” John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. “I am delighted to think of the prospect that you can join me at Madrid for the automobile trip of about two weeks through Italy.” For Douglass: Denys Sutton, “A Lawyer from Philadelphia,” *Apollo* (May 1979): 123-129.

amongst his paintings.⁷⁸ For those who could get past his rough façade, he was well liked and well connected with a broad range of friends and colleagues.

Throughout his life he sought out and maintained a nexus of primary relationships, which connected him to like-minded individuals who shared his two great passions, the law and great paintings. This chapter will describe the networks that contributed to his success—educational, professional, social, collecting, and service—that established the foundation for engagement in new discursive practices regarding art and the public. In concert with many others over the course of his lifetime, Johnson contributed to the progress of art collecting and viewing publics in Philadelphia by a variety of means including: attending art museums, exhibitions, galleries and auctions; developing the skill of close observation of paintings; reading and discussing texts; generating his own critical texts; soliciting expert opinions; publishing catalogs; and exchanging all manner of printed media including letters, notes, telegrams, receipts, contracts, photographs and other ephemera.⁷⁹

Naturally, professionals are expected to connect with peer groups and indeed Johnson tapped into existing organizations, such as the University of Pennsylvania Law School and the Philadelphia Bar Association. He also maintained contacts through third spaces, such as the Philadelphia Club (the oldest and most elite social men’s club in the

⁷⁸ Johnson to Valentiner, December 1909, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. “I am delighted to find that you can come over and dine with me on the coming Saturday, and stay over on Sunday as usual.”

⁷⁹ Thinking on publics sources back to the *Making Publics Project*. Wilson and Yachnin, *Making Publics*.

nation), the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and less formally, his friend Peter A. B. Widener's legendary "Saturday all-night poker game."⁸⁰

While networks can be commonly imagined as physical spaces, featuring face-to-face conversations at social and professional events, more often exchanges are made along structured paths of communication including, but not limited to, letters and telegrams, subscriptions to journals, newsletters, pamphlets and other printed materials. Networks are not necessarily private, but typically they are not public either. The output of established networks might, at times, carry over into a common public space, such as a newspaper editorial or an article in a journal, but often traffic on established networks is hidden from plain view as a result of restricted access. Networks spawn publics when their missives transcend barriers and engage a wider range of individuals who will never meet. Publics are inherently less structured than networks, and generate unique and unexpected forms of discourse. While networks may be formal enough to necessitate membership, i.e. an alumni or professional association, newly formed publics require no forms to sign or organizations to join. A public is born out of the agency of individuals, free actors continually making and remaking knowledge as social agents in emergent discursive spaces. For example, in response to displaying paintings at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, a public of art viewers formed; reviews were written, visitors returned again and shared the experience with others, some rallied around the cause of finding a proper permanent home for the Pennsylvania Museum, which eventually led to

⁸⁰ For the Saturday night poker game see: Quodbach, "Versailles," 48; Hendrick, *The Age of*, 128. E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class Authority and Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1979): 242. Peter Arrell Brown Widener, *Without Drums* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 18.

the building of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This is but one small example of a public, a segment of “the people,” who reacted to and refashioned ideas, and worked toward a common goal (often not in direct contact with one another) until their demands were met, or their respective agencies were quashed, abandoned, or diverted into other pursuits.

Johnson was particularly attuned to the exchange of ideas involving collecting and exhibiting art. Other scholars working on related collectors often cite Johnson as a connector. For example, Quodbach writes, “Johnson must have not only advised Widener but introduced him to his dealers and experts.”⁸¹ In this chapter, I will focus on a few highlights from each network in order to reveal key ideas that informed his thinking.

Educational Network: The Curious Case of Central High School

In a forty-year period, from 1852 to 1890, Central High School in Philadelphia graduated a statistically surprising number of men who went on to make astonishing contributions in the history of American Art, as artists and collectors. Below is a list of some of the most famous names, but there were others. Johnson corresponded with nearly all of these individuals at some point or another.

Collectors:

Peter A. B. Widener, Class 20, 1852

Charles T. Yerkes, Class 27, 1855

John G. Johnson, Class 30, 1857

Alba B. Johnson, Class 66, 1875

John Frederick Lewis, Class 73, 1879

Albert C. Barnes, Class 92, 1889

⁸¹ Quodbach, “Versailles,” 51.

Artists:

William Trost Richards, Class 15, 1850
James Brade Sword, Class 32, 1859
Joseph Boggs Beale, Class 39, 1862
Thomas C. Eakins, Class 38, 1861
William Sartain, Class 38, 1861
John McLure Hamilton, Class 60, 1872
Albert Rosenthal, Class 75, 1880
William Glackens, Class 92, 1890
Joan Sloan (left in 1888 without graduating)

Central High was built in 1838 and was the first institution of its kind outside of New England seeking to offer a high quality public education to working class boys.⁸²

Johnson's parents, a blacksmith and a milliner, were the target market for Central. "The typical nineteenth-century high school was a rather modest extension of the grammar school, but Central high was created out of whole cloth as a distinctively innovative and elevated form of school."⁸³ Central trained the middle class boys of Philadelphia mostly for professional careers, but along the way, something out of the ordinary was communicated to spark so many influential Philadelphia alumni to go on to achievement in the arts.

The origins of the art program date back to 1840 and the appointment of American painter Rembrandt Peale by Alexander Dallas Bache. Bache was great-grandson of Benjamin Franklin, President of Girard College, first President of Central High School, and a strong American advocate for the value of art in educating young

⁸² Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 12.

⁸³ David F. Labaree, *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2.

men.⁸⁴ During Peale's brief four-year tenure, the curriculum was changed to include drawing. Writing was taught in conjunction with drawing. Both were thought to train students in problem solving. Peale wrote a textbook on graphics, which was printed in successive editions and continued to influence the manner in which art education was handled through the Civil War. Peale was focused not only on teaching students to draw, but developing in them an aesthetic sense of quality. Rather than merely molding artists, the concept was to strengthen an awareness of art and introduce it as an academic discipline, which students might then apply to their own interests over time.⁸⁵

Johnson studied art under Alexander Jay McNeill, who, in 1853, replaced George J. Becker, a former assistant to Peale himself.⁸⁶ Art historian Elizabeth Johns has written extensively about Thomas Eakins' art education at Central. Eakins was almost Johnson's exact contemporary, and therefore received the same training under McNeill. Both men learned careful practical methods, where the hope was "clarity of draftsmanship would inspire clarity of thinking."⁸⁷

Decades after graduating Central, Johnson represented Eakins in several legal matters, and in gratitude, in 1887 received a watercolor from the artist, *Drawing the*

⁸⁴ See: Peter C. Marzio, *The Art Crusade: An Analysis of American Drawing Manuals, 1820-1860* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976). For a discussion of a parallel shift in French educational ideas on drawing in the age of Modernism, see Molly Nesbitt, *Their Common Sense* (London: Black Dog Pub, 2000.)

⁸⁵ Franklin Spencer Edmonds, *History of the Central High School of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1902): 51.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Johns, "Drawing Instruction at Central High School and Its Impact on Thomas Eakins," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 15, 2 (Summer 1980): 141.

⁸⁷ Kathleen A. Foster and Mark Bockrath, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 19.

Seine.⁸⁸ It is unclear whether this litigation was related to Eakins dismissal as Director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1886.

In a similar manner, Johnson came to represent Central alumnus Albert C. Barnes in a dispute with his business partner in 1906. It is not known if the two men knew one another prior to this, but it is likely that they had met, or were at least acquainted through Widener. The two men shared a history of achievement at Central, but were drawn together around art collecting. They corresponded in the years following. The extant letters reveal that around 1912 Barnes began inquiring about art collecting, asking advice about dealers, and other matters related to art. In a letter of June 22, 1912, he informed Johnson that he wished to discuss in an upcoming meeting, the business of how to set up the bequest of his estate, especially regarding the paintings he has just begun to collect. “It is my wish to have these made a separate part of my estate, to be given to the city in a way that the best use would be made of them.”⁸⁹

As a collector, Johnson was the first of the triumvirate of Central Alumni including Widener and Yerkes to begin collecting. Johnson made his first purchases around 1880, while Widener and Yerkes began thereafter in the mid-1880s.⁹⁰ Collecting was a claim to status for boys from Central who had to earn what they had in life. Their wealth allowed them to thrive in an active market for European paintings. Johnson was the only of the three to leave his collection to the public. Widener willed it to his son

⁸⁸ Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer*, 177. See Exhibition catalog: Philadelphia Museum of Art, *John G. Johnson: Collector of Contemporary Art* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Dec. 17, 1988-Mar. 26, 1989).

⁸⁹ Barnes to Johnson, June 22, 1912, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

⁹⁰ Esmée Quodbach, “The Last of the American Versailles: The Widener Collection at Lynnewood Hall,” *Simiolus* (2002): 50.

Joseph, who eventually left it to the National Gallery. Yerkes collection was auctioned after his death to settle his estate.

Professional Network: From Scrivener to the Top of the Bar

Upon graduating at the top of his class at Central, Johnson was honored by his teachers with appointment as a scrivener in the law office of Benjamin Rush of the famous Philadelphia family, which included sculptor William Rush. In this lowly post, Johnson would have copied, by hand, hundreds of legal papers, served summonses and subpoenas.⁹¹ He began his career in a legal field operating before typewriters, telephones, and the advent of legal partnerships. According to Hampton Carson, former attorney general of Pennsylvania, Johnson got to view the law in a way that would be impossible just a generation later. “He had the opportunity, denied to the student after the dispersion of the bar into many court rooms following the adoption of the New Constitution, of seeing, at one time and at one place, the active men of the bar in spirited conflict.”⁹² Additionally, he spent time studying mock trials, in a seminar setting, with Philadelphia Judge Sharswood.⁹³ Johnson learned by copying, modeling the styles of his mentors, and attending to careful research. This early training groomed him for later legal practice. In addition, this initial professional training contributed an epistemological framework that

⁹¹ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 21.

⁹² Hampton L. Carson, “John G. Johnson: A Great American Lawyer,” Adapted, by the author, from an address delivered by him before the Pennsylvania Bar Association, June 27, 1917.

⁹³ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 21.

would inform his approach to collecting based on seeking out and engaging with existing knowledge from respected experts.

Johnson was admitted to the bar in 1863. That summer, he served for a brief time as a member of Battery A, First Pennsylvania Artillery, a regiment of members of the Philadelphia Bar in the run up to the Battle at Gettysburg. After the war he returned to legal practice into a rapidly changing world in which the power of corporations was rising in the age of modernism. Johnson specialized in the intricacies of estate and corporate law, and through this expertise, came into contact with many of the most powerful men of his day. By the 1880's he was making \$100,000 a year, in a city where most lawyers made less than \$5,000 a year.⁹⁴

One case that helped to make Johnson's reputation involved a million dollar bequest to the Library Company of Philadelphia by the estate of another member of the Rush family, Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1877. On his deathbed, Rush decided that a new library building, the Ridgeway Library, named for his wife, Phoebe Anne Ridgeway Rush, would be built on South Broad Street. The Library Company considered this site unsuitable, too far from its members. Johnson upheld the will of Rush and the building was built at Broad and Christian streets in Philadelphia.⁹⁵ This case foreshadowed Johnson's own struggle with the City of Philadelphia to accept his art collection on his terms. He stipulated that it was to remain in his house in South Philadelphia, a mere six blocks from the Ridgeway Library building, which was sold to the city in the 1940s and is the current site of the Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts.

⁹⁴ Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer*, 181.

⁹⁵ Weigley, Wainwright, and Wolf, *Philadelphia*, 423. Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, 220.

This was not the first time Johnson had publicly stood up to defend the Rush family. In 1867, he was compelled to defend the reputation of the family by publishing a response to a public slight on the family's name. The small bound volume, entitled, "A Criticism of Mr. Wm. B. Reed's Aspersions on the Character of Dr. Benjamin Rush, with an Incidental Consideration of General Joseph Reed's Character" is quirky and reads like a legal brief, but it is significant in that a young Johnson stepped forward to engage the public with the written word.⁹⁶

Over the next two decades, Johnson went on to represent the Sugar Trust, the Northern Securities Company, the Amalgamated Copper Company, The Pennsylvania Railroad, The New York Central Railroad, United States Steel, and American Distilleries, in addition to being retained by between sixty to eighty banks and practically every great corporation in America."⁹⁷ Throughout his long career, his profession provided him regular access to the most successful men of his age, many of whom were formidable art collectors, namely, Havemeyer, Morgan, Frick, and Widener. He took his place as a member of a new meritocracy, unencumbered by class and status.

As a collector, Johnson was not as rich as the others, but perhaps too much had been made of his lack of buying power relative to the Gilded Age set. It is true that he had the habit in his letters of lampooning "multi-plutocrats" such as Frick; however, this stems from the contrast between his own unique approach to collecting, based on research and developing a good eye for quality, and those intent on acquisition of the best

⁹⁶ John Graver Johnson, *A Criticism of Mr. Wm. B. Reed's Aspersions on the Character of Dr. Benjamin Rush, with an Incidental Consideration of General Joseph Reed's Character* (Philadelphia: Collins, 1867).

⁹⁷ Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer*, 188.

art money could buy with little regard for developing acumen. His vantage point from inside this network of collectors gave him perspective on his own methods. In a letter describing the Yerkes Sale, Johnson wrote to Berenson, “Mr. Frick secured a robust woman, fairly well painted by Frans Hals, worth \$25,000—a price at which it ought to go—at \$137,000 plus 10 per cent to the dealer who obligingly bought it at the auction.”⁹⁸ In another letter to Berenson he wrote, “The marvelous increase in price was justified by nothing except the determination by two people, neither of whom knew the real value of the work, to outbid each other.”⁹⁹ I will expand on Johnson’s particular approach to collecting in Chapter Four.

Social Network: Citizen of Philadelphia

Johnson thrived in Center City Philadelphia. Other than his twelve-mile move, as a young attorney, from Chestnut Hill to Center City Philadelphia, he spent fifty years in a narrow ten-block range of the City. He occupied a mere four addresses, three within a single city block, worked in two offices, visited his social club, and besides the occasional business visit to nearby New York or Washington, or summer travel, he only left the neighborhood once a week, to walk to his brother’s home two miles up Broad Street, to have dinner with his mother. Even Central High was located in this area when he attended.

⁹⁸ Johnson to Berenson, April 25, 1910, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

⁹⁹ Johnson to Berenson, March 21, 1912, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

Johnson's professional and social networks were closely aligned. By most accounts he opted to skip formal parties and dinners. He was the leader of the Philadelphia Bar for nearly forty years, but infamously missed all public events. He engaged with his primary social network at the Philadelphia Club. Unlike the other members of the meritocratic crowd, such as Widener, Yerkes, and Elkins, Johnson was accepted as a member to this oldest and most exclusive men's club in American, as a direct result of his marriage to Ida Powell, a widow of one of his former clients who came from a well-established Philadelphia family and also had roots in New York Society. Johnson's wife continued to vacation each summer in Newport, while he worked and went on art buying excursions.¹⁰⁰ Johnson's name would never appear in the social register, which was first printed in Philadelphia in 1900; nonetheless, in terms of social standing he was part of Philadelphia's elite.

He took lunch daily at the Philadelphia club. Here he might encounter his first art dealer, Frank Haseltine, who operated a gallery at 1125 Chestnut Street, four blocks West of Johnson's office (the gallery later moved three times along Chestnut, from 1516 to 1416, then after a fire in 1896 moved one final time to 1824 Chestnut until Haseltine's death in 1915). Johnson made his earliest purchases from Haseltine, (Figure 1) beginning modestly in 1880, spending \$2,000 on two paintings, to spending \$55,000 on over sixty paintings in 1886 alone.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, 350. "The new and ambitious men of power in the city move from the Union League, to the Rittenhouse, and, eventually, to the Philadelphia Club...the Philadelphia Club passes the final word on acceptance within the inner circles of Proper Philadelphia."

¹⁰¹ Invoices, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

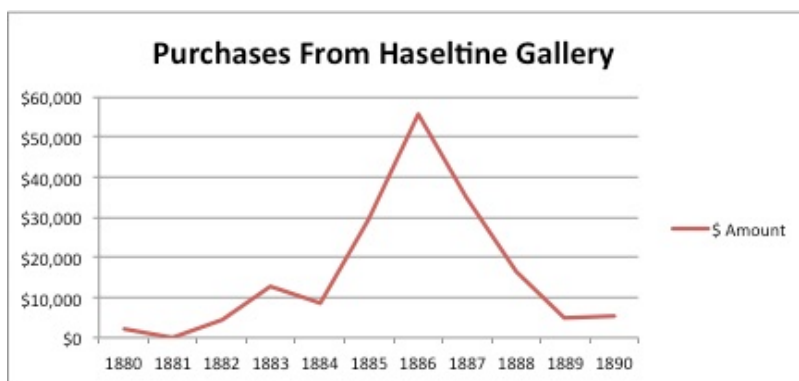


Figure 1: Johnson Purchases from Haseltine Gallery in Philadelphia in 1880s.

Johnson’s purchases at Haseltine peaked in the middle of the decade, at which time he increased his purchases at galleries in New York and abroad as his taste shifted from Barbizon and realist paintings to old masters, as well as some modern painting. For example, he purchased dozens of paintings from the Paul Durand-Ruel Gallery, between 1888-1892, by artists such as Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Degas, and Puvis de Chavannes.¹⁰²

Because of the proximity their respective offices, Johnson and Haseltine, as friends, most likely conducted much of their business in person; as a result, there is limited written correspondence.¹⁰³ It was also regular practice for Johnson to exchange paintings for new purchases, such that few of his earliest purchases at Haseltine remain in the existing collection.

¹⁰² Joseph J. Rishel, *Cézanne in Philadelphia Collections* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983), x.

¹⁰³ Haseltine playfully responds to a threat from Johnson for importing a painting that resembles one that he owns. “I shall require at least a Mitrailleuse for protection, if to save myself from bodily harm.” Haseltine to Johnson, December 1886, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

At the Philadelphia Club, Johnson interacted with Alexander J. Cassatt, seventh president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and brother of the painter Mary Cassatt. Johnson advised Cassatt in legal matters, and after 1897, the two men served together on the Fairmount Park Commission. On Mary Cassatt's recommendation, Johnson purchased a pastel by Edgar Degas, *Ballet from an Opera Box*, c. 1884 from Durand-Ruel in 1891.¹⁰⁴

Carroll S. Tyson Jr. was also a member of the Philadelphia club. Around the turn of the twentieth century, he was building a collection of modern art that he would eventually leave to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Tyson was inspired to collect through the efforts of Mary Cassatt, and another of Johnson's clients, the Havemeyers. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, Johnson struggled with the details of his bequest during this time, largely due to the uncertainty of plans for the Philadelphia Museum. Therefore, he would also have discussed plans for the Philadelphia Museum of Art with Eli Kirk Price, with whom Johnson served on the Fairmount Park Commission. Price played a public role in bringing the Philadelphia Museum of Art to the Parkway in the late 1920s. I will discuss the Johnson's role in the founding of the Philadelphia Museum in Chapter Four.

Johnson straddled high and low culture. Apart from the Philadelphia Club, the other side of his social life involved quotidian pastimes of baseball and poker. He shared a love for baseball with members of his legal circle, and despite being too busy to attend a game, he was said to have delayed more than one trial to check on the score in the

¹⁰⁴ Ann Dumas, David A. Brenneman, and Edgar Degas, *Degas and America: The Early Collectors* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2000), 19.

World Series.¹⁰⁵ In the last year of his life he was hired by the American League to defend its interests in the Baseball Antitrust lawsuit but passed away before it came to trial.¹⁰⁶

The other highlight of his social calendar was a poker game held on Saturday's at Widener's mansion with a group dubbed the "All Night Poker Players." The game dates back to Widener's days as a butcher in the 1860s. It is not clear how often the game was held, but it has merited mention in countless sources. With men like Widener, Johnson, Yerkes, and Elkins in attendance, the informal setting allowed powerful players in Philadelphia finance and politics to converse in ways inappropriate in normal business settings. This was where the business of the City really transpired.¹⁰⁷ And yet, amidst the cigar smoke, whiskey and profanity, Johnson and Widener still had time to argue about paintings.¹⁰⁸

He was also friendly with several Philadelphia artists. He knew fellow alumni from Central William Sartain and William Trost Richards, but he did not collect their work. He did own paintings by T. Alexander Harrison who had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and spent most of his life in Paris. Harrison had

¹⁰⁵ George Wharton Pepper, *Philadelphia Lawyer: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1944): 58. "His only interests besides law were baseball and collecting pictures."

¹⁰⁶ Nathaniel Grow, *Baseball on Trial: The Origin of Baseball's Antitrust Exemption* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2014): 120.

¹⁰⁷ Hendrick, *The Age of*, 126. Domenic Vitiello, *Engineering Philadelphia: The Sellers Family and the Industrial Metropolis* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2013): 120.

¹⁰⁸ Widener, *Without Drums*, 18. Johnson's everyday profanity was legendary. Norris, *Ended Episodes*, 32. "Johnson was very profane, and did not modify his language to suit his client, but his profanity was so wholehearted and good-natured that it was never offensive."

assisted him in buying works in Europe, including rare commission from a living artist, Danish painter Peter Severin Krøyer. (Figure 2)¹⁰⁹



Figure 2: Viggjo Johansen, *My Friends*, 1887, Oil on Canvas, 42 7/8 x 54 7/8 inches (108.9 x 139.4 cm), John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Collecting Network: Investigating the First Steps of a Collector

It is not clear exactly when Johnson purchased his first painting; it is equally uncertain at what point buying became collecting. This “prehistory,” to borrow a term from cultural theorist Mieke Bal, is particularly challenging since the details of any collector’s beginnings only become significant after he is established.¹¹⁰ Such is the case,

¹⁰⁹ Museum label for Peter Severin Krøyer, *Interior of a Tavern*, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

¹¹⁰ Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *The Cultures of*

considering the scant biographical information about his early days as a collector, and constructing a narrative of a series of key moments in Johnson's development could provide a more solid foundation. It is possible to establish where he was, what he saw, and to whom he may have been listening.

Through his connection to Battery A, First Pennsylvania Artillery, Johnson most likely would have walked the four long blocks from his office in the early summer of 1864 to support the Union Army by attending the Great Central Sanitary Fair in Philadelphia. These fairs were civilian-organized events, which showcased all manner of goods for sale to raise money for the war effort, in particular the Sanitary Commission, which was a soldier's relief organization.¹¹¹ The Fair ran for only two weeks in June, yet was amazingly successful with an estimated 400,000 visitors, including President Abraham Lincoln. A major draw for Johnson would have been the art exhibition of 1,000 paintings, sculptures and other objects of art in a long exhibition hall. It was the largest art exhibition held in North America up to that point.¹¹² This grand display certainly would have made an impression on a young and ambitious attorney like Johnson. Just twenty-two, having passed the Bar the prior year, Johnson was gaining experience in the Law Offices of William F. Judson at Broad and Chestnut. The Sanitary Fair gallery, albeit temporary, was on a par with the Crystal Palace or the long gallery of the Louvre,

Collecting, eds. John Elsner and Roger (Cardinal Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994): 101. Bal goes on to say "If one begins reflecting on collecting in a narrative mode, it is equally hard to say when collecting begins to be collecting, as opposed to, say, buying a thing or two."

¹¹¹ Weigley, Wainwright and Wolf, *Philadelphia: A 300-Year*, 412.

¹¹² Elizabeth Milroy, "Avenue of Dreams: Patriotism and the Spectator at Philadelphia's Great Central Sanitary Fair" in *Making and remaking Pennsylvania's Civil War* eds. William Alan Blair and William Pencak (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press), 25.

where one could find stacks upon stacks of European paintings from artists like Rembrandt to works by contemporary American artists like Eastman Johnson, some donated by collectors, others by artists themselves. Here the rising lawyer encountered for the first time, a type of display space that did not yet exist in America, conforming to art historian Tony Bennett's idea of an "exhibitionary complex," which conveyed a sense of cultural knowledge and power. This was a harbinger for larger public exhibitions in America in advance of the rush to build public museums in the most populous cities at the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹³ The potential impact of this exhibition on a man like Johnson is summed up by art historian Elizabeth Milroy: "The success of the Art Gallery of the Great Sanitary Fair inspired these men and women after the war to reassess the role particularly of art museums in the postwar period."¹¹⁴ The experience at the Fair must have been pivotal in shaping his ideas about art and exhibition.

In the next decade, Johnson continued to expand his personal law practice and build his reputation. The next significant moment was the art exhibition at the 1876 Centennial Celebration at Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park. The Archives at the Philadelphia Museum of Art holds a printed catalog for the Centennial Art Exhibition, with hand-written annotations by Johnson. Here he could view nearly 4,000 paintings, drawings and sculptures from twenty countries around the world in an even grander display than that at the Sanitary Fair. This may have been a catalyst for Johnson to collect. At this time he took an interest in the history of art, acquiring Charles Blanc's fourteen-volume *Histoire des Peintres*. And in 1878 he ventured on his first great

¹¹³ On the development of art museums in America, see: Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹¹⁴ Milroy, "Avenue of Dreams," 26.

summer tour to Europe, a practice which continued almost uninterrupted until the end of his life. The number of photos dedicated to paintings in the commemorative albums he printed from this first two vacations with his new bride, Ida Powell, increased with his interest in collecting. On their 1878 trip, less than 10% of the 500 photos are of works of art, while in the catalog from the next trip in 1881, more than 30% of the 500 photos are.¹¹⁵

According to his principal biographer, Barnie Winkelman, Johnson's colleagues and clients were mostly unaware of his passion for art. He went public for the first time in 1885 with an exhibition of forty-one paintings at the Union League in Philadelphia.¹¹⁶ Then in 1892 he published his first catalog of the then 292 pictures in his collection, and in the same year, he published a short work of art criticism called *Sight-Seeing in Berlin and Holland Among Pictures*, aimed at educating other collectors. He touts cultivating one's own judgment rather than relying on the opinions of others, which he cautions might lead in the end to an art collection, which is "unweeded and ... full of incongruities."¹¹⁷

As a good lawyer might he assembled around him, at the turn of the century, a team of respected authorities to offer opinion and counsel. His archives reveal extensive personal correspondence over the last twenty or so years of his life with art experts, mostly from Europe. These men were paid for their opinions. They were connoisseurs

¹¹⁵ John G. Johnson Papers: II. Photographs and other images. Johnson Collection Curatorial Records, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

¹¹⁶ Carl Brandon Strehlke, *Italian Paintings, 1250-1450, in the John G. Johnson Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2004), 1.

¹¹⁷ John G. Johnson, *Sight-Seeing in Berlin and Holland Among Pictures* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott's, 1892): 36.

and critics, forerunners of academic art historians. A brief, non-exhaustive, list in order of frequency of communication reads: Bernard Berenson, Roger Fry, Wilhelm Valentiner, Max J. Friedlander, Wilhelm von Bode, Abraham Bredius, R. Langton Douglas, Herbert Horne, and Georges Hulin de Loo.¹¹⁸ Here Johnson follows his own advice from *Sight-Seeing in Berlin*, cutting out the middleman and doing, or at least coordinating, his own research. He took pride in his ability to spot a great painting and a good deal. He was very sensitive to price and refused to overpay. A window into his thinking and his confident command of the art market is evident in a letter to Edward Robinson, Director of the Metropolitan Museum regarding possible purchases from the Steengracht Sale of 1913. Johnson served on the Board of Directors at the time.

Whilst Boticini is not one of the great artists, he is always good, and sometimes very good. I think the present pictures come up to the last qualification. The Metsu, of the Steengracht Sale, is exceptionally fine, and it not only artistically is good; but I think would be a great popular favorite. For that I would say that we would not go wrong if we were to bid as high as \$35,000. Brouwer is not so popular an artist; but he is one of the very best, if not, after Rembrandt, the very best, colorist of the XVII Century Dutch School. The Steengracht picture is as fine as any that could ever be acquired. \$31,000 would be a high, but not too high, price for it.¹¹⁹

Johnson's letters to his advisors are full of references to auctions and sales, on which he opines at length. In contrast to other collectors, like Widener, he was an autodidact when it came to art and was reputed to have an uncanny ability to absorb text. He was fortunate to live in a time of a greatly expanded printing industry and his library reveals subscriptions to: *Art in America*, *Art Journal* (London), *Burlington Magazine*, *Collector*,

¹¹⁸ John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

¹¹⁹ Johnson to Edward Robinson, May 15, 1913, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

The Connoisseur, and Gazette des Beaux-Arts. His library reads like a bibliography for an art history survey course and includes works of key critics, such as, John Ruskin and James Jarves. He also left behind one of the largest collections of auction catalogs in the United States, which in part is now available online.

In addition to mentoring Barnes, there is ample evidence that Johnson advised Widener on collecting, as well as Elkins, even acting as trustee for his estate.¹²⁰ While the scholarship on Yerkes is less clear, Johnson most likely advised him as well. It is also important to recognize exchanges he had with other collectors, such as Frick:

Roger E. Fry who knew I have for some time been hunting for an example of the noble Master Conegliano, sent one of his many, a photography of one about 3 feet in width, of a very high [altar?] He wrote me that he could buy it for 2000 to 3000 pounds. I saved you the photograph if it should interest you.¹²¹

Service Network: The Last Public Man

This chapter ends not with his death and bequest, which I will pick up in Chapter Five, but with his service. Particularly in the last two decades of his life, Johnson emerged as mentor, and performed his most crucial role in contributing to the shape of the public for art in Philadelphia. Being asked to serve conferred status in the new meritocracy. Johnson consistently rose to the challenge and his peers recognized his achievements. He seems to have been bred for this type of commitment to the public

¹²⁰ “John Graver Johnson Collection,” *American Art News* 15 (April 21, 1917): 1-2.

¹²¹ Johnson to Frick, April 14, 1911, Henry Clay Frick Papers, Series I: Art Files. The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives.

good. For example, in a time when wealthy men like Jack Gardner could afford to buy a replacement for service in the Civil War, Johnson chose to serve.¹²²

Johnson was appointed to the Fairmount Park Commission in December of 1895 and devoted himself particularly to building up the Wilstach Collection.¹²³ The Wilstach fund had been set up to benefit the public art museum that had not yet been built. What existed as the Pennsylvania Museum's permanent collection continued to be displayed in Memorial Hall decades after the 1876 Centennial had passed. Johnson took his commitment to collecting for the museum seriously, ever mindful of what would help to create a representative collection. He was entrusted with this responsibility out of respect for his understanding of the nuances of art collecting. Similarly, Johnson was asked to serve on the Board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1910. In his letter of acceptance he writes, "I am very glad to find that I have been put upon the only committee on which I could be of the slightest possible use."¹²⁴ During his tenure there, he advised the Director in numerous letters as to purchases that should be made. Throughout, his voice is direct, shrewd, and authoritative.

Johnson's final contribution was to the very public discussion surrounding the founding of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This played out in broad view, in the daily newspapers, with strong leadership from fellow Philadelphia club member Eli K. Price. According to art historian Steven Conn, as early as the 1876 Centennial Exposition Price

¹²² Tharp, Louise Hall Tharp, *Mrs. Jack: A Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965).

¹²³ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 245.

¹²⁴ Johnson to the Met Board, March 10, 1911, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

was aware of the importance of large collections that might be willed to the city.¹²⁵ With Morgan and Widener already dead, Johnson was thinking of his legacy. He intended to gift his Collection to the people of Philadelphia, but as Fiske Kimball suggested in his notes for his memoir, Johnson was forced into founding a house or collection museum to protect against city failing to found a proper museum.¹²⁶ At this moment when Johnson was considering his legacy and advocating for the public's access to art, he became a mentor to Albert Barnes.

¹²⁵ Conn, *Museums and American*, 222.

¹²⁶ Fiske Kimball Correspondence 1923-1926, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

CHAPTER 3
REWRITING THE NARRATIVE OF DR. ALBERT C. BARNES:
HOW HIS EARLY HISTORY SHAPED THE COLLECTOR WE KNOW

Introduction

The customary biographical account of Barnes reads as any retelling of the classic American success story, charting the remarkable journey of a brilliant young man who overcame adversity on his way from rags to riches. However, the mythical form rounds out the historical facts to serve the arc of the narrative, leaving details regarding his development and process as a collector opaque. In fact, much of what we know about this early period is ultimately sourced to Barnes himself through public writings and private correspondence, which is problematic according to scholar and curator Richard Wattenmaker, since he often told differing accounts of events in his life.¹²⁷ Yet few have questioned this narrative. Nearly every study of Barnes as a collector begins by recounting some version of the moment when in 1912, he reconnected with high school friend, the American painter, William Glackens and sent him off to Paris to buy thirty or so works of art that would ultimately seed his collection. Paintings from this group still in the collection include: *Toward Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1878-79) by Cézanne, *Young Woman Holding a Cigarette* (1901) by Picasso, and *The Postman* (1889) by Van Gogh, as well as others by Maurice Denis, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley.¹²⁸ This moment was clearly pivotal on his way to becoming a world famous art collector and educator; however, scholars, including Wattenmaker, Jeremy Braddock,

¹²⁷ Richard J. Wattenmaker. *American Paintings and Works on Paper in the Barnes Foundation* (Merion, Pa: Barnes Foundation, 2010), 14.

¹²⁸ Dolkart, *The Barnes Foundation*, 10. Dolkart notes many that many paintings were traded or exchanged for other works in the teens.

and Mary Ann Myers, have acknowledged that Barnes purchased paintings as early as 1904 if not earlier. While they broadly agree that it was not until 1912 that collecting became a “serious concern,” it is still important to consider that there is a history that predates Glackens.¹²⁹ It destabilizes the narrative and invites new questions. For example, what if Barnes had contacted Glackens, not out of mere friendship, but based on the fact that he was recognized as the “best eyes in America” according to Judith Dolkart, former curator of the Barnes Collection?¹³⁰ Ira Glackens, the artist’s son, reported that Barnes was insistent in his repeated attempts to reconnect out of the blue, which does not diminish their friendship, but suggests this may have been a secondary concern.¹³¹

Theorist Mieke Bal has pointed out that art collections don’t have beginnings per se, but often are recognized in medias res, or in the middle of things.¹³² Her narrative approach to collecting posits that the first purchase only makes sense in terms of how the rest of the story plays out. Therefore, the search should not be for the “ur” moment, but for the time “when a series of haphazard purchases or gifts suddenly becomes a meaningful sequence.” If most scholars agree that Barnes became a collector at the pivotal moment when he refined his palette for Modern Art with Glackens’ assistance, then in terms of Bal’s narrative model, everything prior to 1912 can be considered “prehistory.”

¹²⁹ Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist*, 126.

¹³⁰ Dolkart, *The Barnes Foundation*, 10, note 9. “An opinion shared by the painter and critic Guy Pene du Bois.”

¹³¹ Ira Glackens, *William Glackens*, 155.

¹³² Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994): 101. Bal “Only retrospectively, through a narrative manipulation of the sequence of events, can the accidental acquisition of the first object become the beginning of a collection.”

This chapter will investigate this period prior to 1912, when historians typically mark his birth as a collector, to identify experiences that established a foundation for his eventual success. I will claim that contact with Glackens is not enough to explain the collector he became. By the time he actively sought out his old school friend, Barnes had already formed a nascent, but solid, skill-set as collector, which would both inform his interaction with him and guide the vision for his Foundation. This is not to deny the importance of Glackens' role as a catalyst, but to offer a view of how he got to that point, pushing against the general consensus that his life as a collector began at that moment. Central to this study is a consideration of the existence of a mentor for Barnes; a topic often mentioned in passing that has not been subjected to serious scrutiny. Without a doubt, he benefitted greatly from those who came before in Philadelphia, particularly his attorney, and fellow art collector, John G. Johnson. He borrowed ideas judiciously from his predecessors and contemporaries alike. I will first deal with the circumstances of how he became a collector and sort out the matter of why Johnson was the clear mentor for Barnes and how these seminal experiences prepared him to engage with new ideas like those of John Dewey and establish his Foundation in the next decade. I will then characterize the Barnes that we know from extant scholarship as a fierce competitor, whose terribilità has too long obscured his beginnings. In a sense we need to set aside the Barnes we know, whose public efforts over a lifetime shaped a discourse around issues of display and education around Modern art, in order to trace the roots of his thinking to the previous generation. This will reveal what occurred in the decades prior to establishing the Foundation to shape his views.

As if straight out of central casting, Dr. Albert C. Barnes—affluent, self-assured, uncompromising—seemed to typify the Great American art collector in the opening decades of the 20th century. But he stood apart from the crowd in significant ways. He steadfastly relied on his own judgment and was determined to use his art collection to educate, rather than merely entertain, especially working Philadelphians. Barnes did not descend from old money; he was the son of a butcher from one of the poorest sections of the city. He graduated from the prestigious Central High School in 1889 and earned his medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania by 1892. Instead of practicing medicine he dedicated the next decade to research, and went on to invent the antiseptic Argyrol (with partner Herman Hille), which made him terribly rich. He is not widely known outside of Philadelphia, but within the museum world and in academia, he is remembered for amassing one of the world’s most valuable collections of Post-Impressionist art.¹³³

The Barnes Collection features masterpieces including Paul Cézanne’s *The Card Players* (1890-92), Henri Matisse’s *The Joy of Life* (1906), Matisse’s site-specific mural *The Dance* (1932-33), Pablo Picasso’s *Acrobat and Young Harlequin* (1905), and Georges Seurat’s *Models* (1886-88), to name a few. There are also roughly 200 paintings by American artists, including African American artist Horace Pippin, and many works that predate 1900 including paintings by Eduard Manet, Gustave Courbet, Peter Paul Rubens, El Greco, Francisco Goya, works of African and Egyptian sculpture, and Medieval art as well. All told there are more than 4,000 objects in the Collection, including metalwork and decorative arts of all kinds. A unique feature is the density of paintings from certain

¹³³ Barnes collected art from all eras, but the most valuable works are from Post-Impressionism. His educational program took a universal view of human creativity. In addition to paintings he collected sculpture and decorative arts as well.

artists; of the 900 paintings there are 181 by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 69 by Paul Cézanne, 59 by Henri Matisse, 46 by Pablo Picasso, 21 by Chaim Soutine, 18 by Henri Rousseau, 16 by Amedeo Modigliani, 11 by Edgar Degas, 7 by Vincent van Gogh, and 6 by Georges Seurat. Barnes indicated in a letter to his mentor John G. Johnson in 1912, “I have duplicates of most of the works, selected with the idea of representing the versatility of the men as regards their art.”¹³⁴ His reputation rests not merely with the high quality of the paintings, but with the innovative educational foundation he established and the public battles he waged to defend his particular approach to art education and exhibition during his life, which continued by way of his Indenture of Trust long after death.

As a successful entrepreneurial scientist, Barnes was an unlikely prophet of art education. Yet he was a restless man seldom satisfied with the status quo. In the first decade of the twentieth century, in the midst of his early success with his invention, he piloted an innovative educational program for his workers (less than a dozen) at his small pharmaceutical factory in Philadelphia. He had decided that since the work could get done in less than an eight-hour day, the employees could be encouraged to spend a portion of each day being instructed by Barnes and another employee, Mary Mullen (who was hired to oversee advertising and promotion at the firm), through the reading of great works of philosophy and history. Between 1912 and 1914, Barnes had rapidly amassed over 200 works of art and by 1914 he included the study of paintings from his collection, which he displayed at the factory to help his workers to learn to look at great art.¹³⁵ It was

¹³⁴ Barnes to Johnson, June 22, 1912, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹³⁵ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 19-20. According to Wattenmaker the experiment began as text-based seminars as early as 1902. Barnes Foundation and Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 4.

in these years that he transformed his role from mere accumulator of objects to an active agent in promoting the educational value of art. This was the work he wanted to continue when he established the Foundation in Merion Pennsylvania in 1922.

The initial project was targeted at workers with little education, many of whom were African-American, in an attempt to enrich their lives. Barnes said of this experience, “What we believe our experiment indicates is that great things of creation, in art, literature and thinking, can be resolved to fundamentals of human nature and in simple form be so presented that they may be grasped by plain, even illiterate, people.”¹³⁶ This type of rhetoric, where those who know better seek to help others for their own good, is patently paternalistic. Yet there is ample evidence of his commitment to improve the lives of his African-American workers. His early interest in African-American culture is commonly traced to Methodist revival meetings his mother took him to as a young boy, where he was inspired by gospel music and spirituals. He would later support performances yearly by black choir groups at the Foundation. In and around 1922, with the guidance of dealer Paul Guillaume, Barnes added more than 100 works of African sculpture in his galleries. According to art historians, Christa Clarke and Arthur Bourgeois, “Beyond simply fostering artistic appreciation for African art, Barnes had a socially progressive purpose behind his advocacy. He believed that the study of African art, as an important form of black cultural expression, could serve as a good for racial advancement and equality.”¹³⁷ Over the course of the 1920s, Barnes was in contact with leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke and Charles S. Johnson. As an indication

¹³⁶ Albert C. Barnes, “The Barnes Foundation” *The New Republic* (March 14, 1923): 66.

¹³⁷ Christa Clarke and Arthur Bourgeois, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art Nègre and the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2015), 22.

of their esteem for Barnes, he was asked to write an article for Locke's 1925 anthology of fiction, poetry and essays *The New Negro*.¹³⁸ In addition, he supported the work of African-American artists. Prominent examples are painters Aaron Douglas and Horace Pippin, and writer Gwendolyn Bennett.¹³⁹ He offered Douglas and Bennett paid fellowships in 1928, and later in the 1940s, invited Pennsylvania artist, Pippin to study at the Foundation after purchasing four of his paintings.

Becoming a Collector

About twenty years ago I bought a few paintings because I liked them. Every summer, when abroad, I formed the habit of going to the big galleries, to various exhibitions of contemporary painting and to the dealers. Incidentally, I read a lot of books on art but got little or nothing out of them because they jarred what I had learned of the psychology I had been reading since my college days. During all this time, I had been buying more paintings that represented my developed experience. After five years, none of my original pictures were on the walls of my house.¹⁴⁰

In the process of relocating the Barnes Foundation Archives from Merion to Center City, documents were discovered confirming that Barnes had spent \$600 at Haseltine Gallery in Philadelphia in 1904; however, it is not evident what he purchased.¹⁴¹ In the above letter, Barnes indicates a qualitative difference in paintings that he simply "liked" from those he was able to acquire after he gained "experience." The proud and impatient Dr. Barnes seemed to be directly responding to the popular wisdom espoused by American

¹³⁸ Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art and America," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: A.C. Boni, 1925): 19-25.

¹³⁹ Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist*, 108.

¹⁴⁰ Barnes to Wendell P. Bush, January 30, 1923, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁴¹ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 53. From note 33, "In 1904 Barnes spent \$600 at Haseltine."

Charles Lang Freer, “The majority of collectors make the enormous mistake of spending the first 10 or 12 years gathering trash and the balance of their lives in getting rid of it.”¹⁴² Barnes publicly wrote of this process in *Arts and Decoration* in 1915, “Every collector who studies his paintings soon learns to accept his own discarded pictures as the necessary milestones on his way to the destination.”¹⁴³

While evidence continues to be explored to adequately reconstruct Barnes’ earliest purchases, it is useful to review what we currently know, and how we know, in order to begin to contextualize his first moves as a collector and consider unexamined questions regarding his development. In her 2004 work, *Art, Education, & African-American Culture: Albert Barnes and the Science of Philanthropy*, Mary Ann Meyers guesses that Barnes may have purchased his first paintings while a student in Germany sometime in the final decade of the nineteenth century, but provides no date or support for this claim.¹⁴⁴ This would be much earlier than any other theory and suggests that Barnes had an interest in art before he had the disposable income to even consider becoming a collector. This is not inconsistent with other biographers who have noted his passion for art at Central High, despite his apparent lack of skill at creating it. Yet there is a great distance between an interest in art and a desire to collect.

Art critic Aline Saarinen is often quoted by scholars on the topic of his initial purchases: “An old schoolmate, William Glackens, rescued the nouveau-riche Barnes in the nick of time from spending his money on a ‘correct collection’ of Barbizon School

¹⁴² Ernest William Watson, Review of *James McNeill Whistler at the Freer Gallery of Art*, by David Park Curry, in *American Artist* Volume 49 (Watson-Guptill Publications, April 1985): 21.

¹⁴³ Barnes, “How to Judge”, 248.

¹⁴⁴ Myers, *Art, Education*, 27. Others confirm that Barnes was in Germany in 1894-1895, and again in 1900.

paintings.”¹⁴⁵ Her quote wonderfully satirizes the conventional taste of the newly rich seeking status by acquiring certain types of fine art, vintage wine, rare jewels, or any other treasure, while also buttressing the widely accepted view that pre-Glackens Barnes was unsure of himself in the realm of fine art and was simply following the herd.

Saarinen’s 1958 *The Proud Possessors* is well researched and eminently quotable, but it is not a scholarly text and therefore sources are not completely documented. Most likely she had reviewed primary material from Ash Can School painters, John Sloan and William Glackens (by way of his son Ira Glackens), which reveals that much of what we think we know of this early period tracks to these two sources. These painters traced personal connections with Barnes back to Central High School: Barnes and Glackens graduated in 1889 and 1890 respectively. Sloan left the school in 1888 and never earned a degree. Barnes knew Sloan well and purportedly had purchased one of his first canvases in 1911.¹⁴⁶ In Sloan’s *Gist of Art Principles and Practice Expounded in the Classroom and Studio*, (1939), a book describing his practice as an artist, Sloan quoted Glackens on the matter of Barnes’ earliest acquisitions:

When he started he had the ordinary rich man’s collection and had spent many thousands of dollars. He told Glackens that he had acquired paintings from the best dealers in New York and Philadelphia. Glackens said, I know what you have. A couple of Millets, red heads by Henner, a Diaz, and fuzzy Corots. They are just stinging you as they do everybody who has money to spend.¹⁴⁷

Sloan cites names of artists, but it is not clear if Barnes actually owned paintings by any of them at this early date, or if Sloan was reporting on Glackens’ retelling of things.

¹⁴⁵ Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959), 219.

¹⁴⁶ Myers, *Art, Education*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ John Sloan, *John Sloan on Drawing and Painting: Gist of Art* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2000), 25.

While there are a few portraits by Corot still featured in the Collection, there are no works by the others. Further on in the same passage, Sloan may offer an explanation as he identifies Barnes as the type who transcended fashion and mere consumption as he learned to “like, buy, learn better, sell and buy again.”¹⁴⁸ This is a typical practice for collectors to trade in purchases as their tastes evolve. Years later, Glackens’ son Ira confirmed his father’s account in his book, *William Glackens and the Eight: The Artists Who Freed American Art* (1957): “Consisting of then accepted painters: Corot, and others of the Barbizon School, etc. W.G. told Barnes that greater painters were more worthy of his attention.”¹⁴⁹ Ultimately, this all confirms the standard view of Barnes as one who was greatly assisted by Glackens and helps to establish the source for the prevailing history while at the same time opening a window to his development just before this period.

The idea of Barnes as a conventional collector before 1911 is further strengthened by Ira Glackens suggestion that Barnes did not immediately warm to the paintings that his father sent back from Paris and wondered “why were these paintings good?”¹⁵⁰ He attributed Barnes’ work as a chemist to helping him to study and analyze the works again and again until he came upon a satisfactory approach. Similarly, Meyers aligned Barnes’ approach with “the same high intelligence, focus, and discipline that had marked his business career.”¹⁵¹ In each case, the implication is that Barnes had the ambition to collect and was willing to work at it.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 26.

¹⁴⁹ Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Eight: The Artists Who Freed American Art* (New York City: Writers & Readers Pub. in association with Tenth Avenue Eds, 1990), 156.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 160.

¹⁵¹ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 30.

Barnes was an extraordinary man who began much like everyone else in a rather ordinary way, taking cues from what others were doing. His impetus to collect is not a mystery. The sociological concept of habitus, developed by Pierre Bourdieu and others, explains acquired behaviors of an individual as a reaction to the world around him or her. In this light, Barnes' advance into the world of collecting could be considered a response to opportunities afforded by newly found wealth; however, this explanation is complicated by the fact that Barnes was not your typical nouveau riche. He was outspokenly disinterested in the privileges of Philadelphia high society, and spent most of his adult life battling those he considered to be social elites. Yet, this poor kid from one of the roughest sections of Philadelphia took great pride in his accomplishments and was not immune to the lure of status. This is most evident in his attempt at fox hunting in his early thirties when he was first making serious money, calling to mind the image from the 1940 film *A Philadelphia Story* of the pretentious character of George Kittredge mounted on horseback trying to keep up with bluebloods on the wealthy Main Line outside of Philadelphia.¹⁵²

Barnes was not unfamiliar with the world of art due in part to his continued contact with members of his educational network from Central High—Johnson, Widener, Eakins, Glackens, and Sloan. Perhaps following the lead of more experienced collectors, such as Johnson and Widener, he began with what was at hand—Haseltine Galleries on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia would have been familiar to him. Founded in 1868, the gallery changed addresses up and down Chestnut over the next fifty years. As a schoolboy, when his parents moved to Tasker Street in Center City Philadelphia, he

¹⁵² Meyer, *Art, Education*, 25; Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist*, 126.

would have walked past Haseltine at Fourteenth and Chestnut on his daily two and a half mile round trip on Broad Street to Central High School. In the first decade of the century, after Haseltine's had burned down and reopened at Eighteenth and Chestnut Streets, Barnes and Hille founded their first factory in a barn near Thirteenth and Spruce, a mere eight blocks east.¹⁵³

In terms of what he chose to buy, it was more a matter of what was for sale. Barnes trod a path well worn by many other American collectors. According to art historian Walther Liedtke, many others including William L. Elkins, P.A.B. Widener, and Henry Walters, began by first acquiring fashionable nineteenth-century painters.¹⁵⁴ Isabella Stewart Gardner had a particular taste for Barbizon paintings until art historian Bernard Berenson directed her eyes to the joys of Italian painting; and Henry and Louisine Havemeyer bought Barbizon works until they were steered to the Impressionists by American artist Mary Cassatt.¹⁵⁵ Johnson bought many such works of nineteenth-century realism during his first decade of collecting, (coincidentally?) at Haseltine. Storage for the John G. Johnson Collection, housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, contains dozens and dozens of such pleasant if unremarkable paintings, which are seldom deemed compelling enough to compete for placement in the galleries. Since none of Barnes'

¹⁵³ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 14-15. In 1908, Argyrol Factory moved to 24 N. 40th St. near the University of Pennsylvania.

¹⁵⁴ Walther Liedtke, "Dutch Paintings in America: The Collectors and Their Ideals," in *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, ed. B. P. J. Broos et al. (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1990), 44.

¹⁵⁵ Walther Liedtke, "Dutch Paintings," 44. Johnson: "John G. Johnson, Note Lawyer Dies," *New York Times* (April 15, 1917). Stewart-Gardner: Theodore E. Stebbins and Virginia Anderson, *The Last Ruskinians: Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Herbert Moore, and Their Circle* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Art Museums, 2007), 24. Havemeyers: Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 149.

Barbizon works remain in his collection, it is useful here to consider a painting from Johnson's to confirm the appeal of these paintings as a safe entry point for inexperienced collectors. In *Mountain Path October* by Theodore Rousseau, (Figure 3), the viewer enters the landscape painting, devoid of human activity, on a narrow rocky path, with a steep drop-off to the left side. The soft brushwork is pleasing and representative of the type of realism popular in the Romantic Movement and the subject matter is accessible and anodyne.



Figure 3. Pierre-Étienne-Théodore Rousseau, *Mountain Path October*, 1831, Oil on canvas, 15 x 18 3/16 inches (38.1 x 46.2 cm), John G. Johnson Collection Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The market began shifting away from Barbizon paintings towards works of the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Symbolists in the final decade of the nineteenth century, but not entirely.¹⁵⁶ For example, the Havemeyers, whose collection Barnes

¹⁵⁶ Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures*, 57.

claimed to admire above all others for the quality of the paintings, as well its commitment to the work of the Impressionists, bought 20 Barbizon paintings in 1889 from Durand-Ruel Gallery alone.¹⁵⁷ Others such as Johnson, Widener, Stewart-Gardner, Frick, and Morgan, moved on to the Old Masters although they did collect some Modern works, e.g. Johnson owned works by Manet, Courbet, Monet and Degas.¹⁵⁸

Art dealers, who comprised a rapidly forming public of culturally informed businessmen, were a conservative group and showcased what they knew they could sell. They increasingly thrived in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in commercial city centers—London, Paris, New York. Philadelphia was the third largest city by population in America, having been surpassed by Chicago in the 1890s. European dealers in particular were only too happy to serve the needs of a new breed of extraordinarily wealthy Americans looking to buy into the upper class. Many dealers, such as Joseph Duveen and Paul Durand-Ruel, also opened galleries in New York. There were voices that lamented the crass commercialism of the dealers; for example Bernard Berenson wrote to Stewart-Gardner in 1909 that dealers were “the most distressingly odious people in the whole world.”¹⁵⁹ Barnes expressed his own discontent on the matter in 1915 in *Arts and Decoration* claiming that too many wealthy collectors merely relied on dealer’s opinions.

The Weidner [sic] and Frick are swagger, the former electing in blue-bloodedness of great pictures by names conjured with by the experts and

¹⁵⁷ Jennifer Thompson, “Durand-Ruel and America” in *Discovering the Impressionists: Paul Durand-Ruel and the New Painting*, ed. Sylvie Patry (National Gallery Company Limited, 2015), 149.

¹⁵⁸ Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures*, 57.

¹⁵⁹ Bernard Berenson, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Mary Berenson, and Rollin van N. Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1887-1924, with Correspondence by Mary Berenson* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 451.

dealers in old masters...The Johnson collection is one for the scholar interested in differentiating the fine points of ancient paintings...Havemeyers is the best and wisest collection in America. There are less old masters...but that is more than compensated for by the large number of paintings by the men that make up the greatest movement in the entire history of art – the Frenchmen of about 1860 and later, whose work is so richly expressive of life that means most to the normal man alive today. One could study art and its relations to life to better advantage in the Havemeyer collection than in any other single gallery in the world.¹⁶⁰

It is clear that Barnes was impressed with the makeup of the Havemeyer Collection, particularly paintings by the Impressionists. While he acknowledged the careful approach of the Havemeyers, he also knew that Mary Cassatt and Paris dealers Durand-Ruel and Vollard closely guided them. It is clear is that just three years after Glackens' counsel, Barnes possessed a surprisingly confident and mature view of the world of collecting, which suggests that he may have had a head start before meeting Glackens.

Finding a Mentor

Barnes emerged into a culture of collecting in Philadelphia. He witnessed first-hand fellow alumni from Central High School—P. A. B. Widener and John G. Johnson—create fortunes and join the ranks of prominent American art collectors. At the same time, the city was host to ample galleries and venues to view art, including a display of fine art for sale inside Wannamaker's department store (opened in 1881). There was constant chatter in the newspapers during the opening decade of the century, when Barnes began to collect, about where to build the new public Pennsylvania Museum of Art to display the thousands of works of art that might be donated from Widener, Johnson, Charles

¹⁶⁰ Barnes, "How to Judge", 248.

Yerkes, William L. Elkins, and others.¹⁶¹ Barnes took steps to be part of what was happening around him, not merely to collect for his own enjoyment, but to leave a legacy to the people of Philadelphia, and similar to Johnson was not at the outset fixed on a museum of his own. As early as June 1912, just a few months after Glackens returned from Paris, Barnes raised the issue of changing the terms of his will in a letter to Johnson who acted as his attorney, shifting from a bequest to the University of Pennsylvania to an unnamed “institution connected with the city.”¹⁶² Later in 1915 he expanded on the idea in another letter to Johnson:

If I live, the collecting will undoubtedly be enlarged and improve, and I believe would be worthy of representing, in the Municipal Collection, the phase of art that developed between 1870 and the time of my activity in collecting. I would want a separate room and am willing to devise sufficient endowment for its maintenance, if that would be necessary, and would prefer to have it bear my name...If there is to be a City Gallery for the good and really important collections now owned by individuals, I would like to have you draw for me a codicil embodying my wishes as above stated.¹⁶³

Unfortunately for Philadelphia, the new museum was contested for too long; the main building was not begun until 1919 and not completed until 1928. When Widener died in 1915, he left his estate in the care of his son Joseph, who decades later in 1939, donated the cream of the collection to the National Gallery in Washington. Sometime before his death in 1917, Johnson decided not to risk his beloved paintings to an uncertain future in the hands of politicians and changed his will to establish a museum in his home. As well, the Yerkes collection was sold at auction in 1910 to settle his estate. Only the Elkins

¹⁶¹ “\$10,000,000 in Art for Philadelphia,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1908, 1.

¹⁶² Barnes to John G. Jonson, June 22, 1912, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁶³ Barnes to John G. Jonson, January 21, 1915, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

collection made it to what would become the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Amid the wrangling, Barnes turned away from the idea of contributing to a “municipal” collection and over the next decade formulated a plan to establish his own educational foundation.

Art historians routinely identify key players who seemed to appear at just the right moment to support collectors, e.g. Bernard Berenson for Stewart-Gardner, James Abbott McNeill Whistler for Charles Lang Freer or Frank Jewett Mather for Duncan Phillips.¹⁶⁴ Despite the prevailing opinion (crafted in part by Barnes) that he was beholden to no one, recent scholarship frequently employs the term mentor for one of three supporting figures—John Dewey, William Glackens, or Leo Stein. The word is used to describe these relationships in many sources.¹⁶⁵ It cannot be disputed that each of these men assisted Barnes’ development. Surely, one may have more than one mentor, particularly at different times in one’s life. Furthermore, one might have more than one type, “intellectual” or otherwise, and these can overlap. In terms of Barnes’ prehistory as a collector, I am less interested in those who guided him on what to buy, and more interested in how he assimilated the process of collecting. It is important to acknowledge that Barnes’ relationship with Johnson did not end when he met Glackens and the others;

¹⁶⁴ Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist*, 117.

¹⁶⁵ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 27. “Barnes found in Dewey an intellectual mentor.” David Bruce Brownlee and Derek Gillman, *The Barnes Foundation: Two Buildings, One Mission* (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli, in association with the Barnes Foundation, 2012), 18. “Founded on the pragmatic philosophy of his mentor John Dewey.” Arthur C. Danto, “Every Straw Was the Last,” *New York Times Book Review* (November 22, 1987), 13. “Barnes’s great friend and mentor, John Dewey.” Robert Cozzolino, “PAFA and Dr. Barnes,” *American Art* 27, no. 3: (2013): 20-26. “William J. Glackens, Barnes’s longtime friend and profoundly influential mentor.” Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist*, 126. “He established an important friendship with Leo Stein, who would become a mentor.”

rather it strengthened as he learned to ask better questions and his acumen compounded as he gained confidence as a collector.

Johnson was the most likely mentor for Barnes. In this instance, the mentor relationship connotes the informal sharing of a specific field of knowledge from a trusted expert, often from one generation to an eager member of another. In the above examples with Dewey, Glackens, and Stein, it might refer in the more colloquial sense to one who assists a less experienced acquaintance through a new process or skill in which they are lacking. However, more specifically in the type of knowledge transfer that figured prominently (and still does) in Johnson and Barnes' respective professional fields of law and medicine, it is important to stress the act of modeling appropriate behavior on the way to mastery, leading by example rather than by instruction, often featuring the key element of face-to-face interaction.¹⁶⁶

Mary Ann Meyers offers perhaps a more suitable term in her third chapter "The Collector and His Tutors" to describe Barnes' connection with the four men, the above-mentioned plus Johnson. It is clear from her detailing of the relationships that Barnes needed to sharpen his skills and sought out expert opinion. She begins the chapter with Johnson claiming that he provided a model for Barnes to follow in "his own forays into the art market."¹⁶⁷ While Meyers connected Barnes to Johnson, I will separate Johnson from the others and formalize the idea of a general "model" as a mentoring relationship. This is more than just a question of terminology; I claim that these men had a series of

¹⁶⁶ Barry Bozeman and Mary Feeney, "Toward a Useful Theory of Mentoring," *Administration & Society* 39, no. 6 (2007): 719-739. Cindy Buell, "Models of Mentoring in Communication," *Communication Education* Vol. 53 1 (2004).

¹⁶⁷ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 27. She is a rich source for the correspondence between these men and Barnes.

specific dispositions and discursive practices that reveal a shared cast of mind especially regarding the relationship between art and the public.

In addition to Meyers, there have been other passing mentions by scholars of a connection between the two men. For example, former curator at the Barnes, Judith Dolkart noted, “Through his business, Barnes knew well the Philadelphia attorney John G. Johnson.” Richard Wattenmaker referred to Johnson as “Barnes’s friend and early guide.” The most extended comparison has been a single paragraph by historian John Lukacs; in his study of the complex nature of Philadelphia society in the first half of the twentieth century, he indicates the two men had many things in common, e.g. “They were sardonic, self-centered, childless.” And while he correctly emphasized, “Their collections depended on their own convictions and tastes,” he sealed off further analysis by claiming, “There *that* parallel ends.”¹⁶⁸ While some have pointed to resonance between these two collectors, no serious study of their interrelationship and impact on the shaping of art publics in Philadelphia has been done.

As noted, a great deal of scholarship on Barnes reports on the personal relationships with Dewey, Glackens and Stein as key players, focusing less on Johnson.¹⁶⁹ This study will leave the broader biographical details of the first three to other scholars, but it is necessary here to assess how each acted more as tutors than mentors. According to Ira Glackens, his father had not heard from Barnes in many years

¹⁶⁸ Dolkart, *The Barnes Foundation*, 10. Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 27. Lukacs, *Philistines*, 262. Also see: John Anderson, *Art Held Hostage: The Battle Over the Barnes Collection* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 17-18.

¹⁶⁹ In particular, Meyers, *Art, Education*; Braddock, *Colleting as Modernist*; Anderson, *Art Held Hostage*; Neil Rudenstine, *The House of Barnes: The Man, the Collection, the Controversy*, 2012.

when he suddenly began sending letters and telegrams in earnest.¹⁷⁰ It is most likely that Barnes was not entirely satisfied with the paintings he had acquired up to that point and was aware that his friend would be critical of his rather ordinary collection of nineteenth-century realists. In this way, we can imagine Barnes deliberately enlisting Glackens as a tutor on modern paintings. The two men visited museums and galleries together and discussed what they saw. A key part of this relationship was Glackens introducing Barnes to the extended group of artists that revolved around Alfred Stieglitz in his 291 Gallery at 293 Fifth Avenue in New York where he would go on to buy works from American modernists Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley. In addition, Glackens close association with other painters of the Ash Can School, and their focus on the lives of ordinary Americans must have made an impression on Barnes. It is clear that from Glackens, Barnes was challenged to look at paintings in a new way and that he gained the added benefit of meeting working artists. Had he had not been able to reconnect with Glackens, it is possible that Barnes might have gleaned this knowledge from another individual, but it is a matter of history that with his friend's guidance, Barnes was able to quickly amass a remarkable collection of paintings that just a year earlier would have been inscrutable to him. He returned to Paris in 1912 and bought 20 works including four Renoirs, three Bonnards, seven small Picassos, a van Gogh, two Matisses, a Gauguin, and works by Daumier, Pissarro, and six Cezannes.¹⁷¹ These experiences strengthened him as a collector but they were not sustained or deep enough to rise to the level of mentoring.

Barnes first met Leo and Gertrude Stein in the fall of 1912. He and Leo were drawn to one another and continued active correspondence. Stein helped Barnes to focus

¹⁷⁰ Ira Glackens, *William Glackens*, 155.

¹⁷¹ Rudenstine, *The House*, 46.

his ideas on art criticism, and connected him to dealers in Paris. This spanned decades both in person and by mail. Barnes' collection benefitted greatly from this relationship since he was able to purchase dozens of quality paintings from Stein over the years, including most famously Matisse's *Le Bonheur de Vivre* (1905-6). While they remained in touch, they were peers, not mentor and protégé. This was most evident in their significant falling out regarding the publishing of Stein's book, *The A-B-C of Aesthetics* (1927).¹⁷²

Barnes attended a seminar taught by Dewey at Columbia University in 1917, after contacting him the year before. By that time, Barnes was well established as a collector and was primed intellectually to appreciate and apply Dewey's theory of progressive education. This course started him down a path towards designing his own program of art education centered on experience rather than art history.¹⁷³ Barnes was drawn to Dewey's idea of how objective judgments and evaluations of works of art might be made.¹⁷⁴ Undoubtedly, Dewey had much to teach Barnes about his chosen field of American pragmatism, but from that time forward the two men worked as collaborators to design the educational program of the Foundation. Dewey gave the dedication address at the opening of the Foundation in 1925 and was its first Director. While he was not pivotal in

¹⁷² Barnes did have kind words to comfort Stein's widow at the end of his life: "It's safe to say that my talks with him in the early days were the most important factor in determining my activities in the art world." Barnes to Nina Stein, August 1, 1947, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Quoted in Dolkart, *The Barnes Foundation*, 13. John Rewald was critical of Barnes for taking advantage of other collectors when they were in financial need. John Rewald, *Cézanne and America: Dealers, Collectors, Artists and Critics, 1891-1921* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 276-277.

¹⁷³ Patricia F. Goldblatt, "How John Dewey's Theories Underpin Art and Art Education," *Education and Culture* 22, no. 1 (2007), 32.

¹⁷⁴ John Dewey, *The Philosopher of the Common Man; Essays in Honor of John Dewey to Celebrate His Eightieth Birthday* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 9.

Barnes' initial development as a collector, one could make a case that Dewey was an educational mentor. His experiential approach to education provided Barnes the theoretical basis he was missing to round out his educational experiment.

The Missing Piece: Barnes Meets Johnson

Barnes' relationship with Philadelphia attorney and art collector John G. Johnson has been mostly overlooked, due in part to the fact that Johnson himself has remained outside of the pantheon of famous American art collectors, such as Henry Clay Frick, Henry and Louisine Havemeyer, Isabella Stewart Gardner, J. Paul Getty, J.P. Morgan, Peggy Guggenheim, etc. This may change as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, current home of the Johnson Collection, aims to reintroduce Johnson to the art world in a non-touring show in Autumn 2017, "Old Masters Now: Celebrating the Johnson Collection."

The first documented connection between the two men occurred when Barnes hired Johnson as his attorney in a dispute with his business partner Herman Hille. By February of 1907, Barnes instructed Hille to send all future correspondence to his attorney Johnson, which strongly suggests that he had hired Johnson earlier in 1906.¹⁷⁵ The earliest surviving letter between the two men is from Johnson to Barnes on September 30, 1908 confirming the dissolution of the partnership.¹⁷⁶ It is very likely that they met personally before entering a client/attorney agreement. Despite the fact that Johnson was a generation older, they would have been connected through a series of

¹⁷⁵ Barnes to Herman Hille, February 5, 1907, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Quoted in Dolkart, *The Barnes Foundation*, 13.

¹⁷⁶ Johnson to Barnes, September 30, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

networks, both from Central High School and in the world of business. Moreover, these men worked or lived in the same small section of the city over the first decade of the century. Barnes first factory was in a stable in Center City Philadelphia just a few blocks from Johnson's home and his social club. An inveterate peripatetic, Johnson likely walked past Barnes' location on his way to the office at 8th and Walnut, until moving his office even closer to Broad and Chestnut in 1905. They could well have met at Widener's legendary Saturday all-night poker game.¹⁷⁷ This is not a stretch, since Barnes was a card player; he often claimed he earned a living gambling in the years between his studies at the University of Pennsylvania and his education in Germany. The ample letters left behind by each collector support their relationship. For example, in addition to letters they personally exchanged, between 1908 and 1915, there are several letters written to Barnes, after Johnson's death in 1917, by people he did not know, inquiring about the fate of Johnson's art collection. This suggests that others were aware of Barnes association with Johnson.¹⁷⁸ Most telling was a response in one such letter, where Barnes wrote, "I knew Mr. Johnson intimately and had access to his collection during many years of his life."¹⁷⁹

By the time the two men met, Johnson had been collecting art for three decades. The first letter concerning the topic of art is from June of 1912, when Barnes sought

¹⁷⁷ For the Saturday night poker game see: Quodbach, "Versailles," 48; Hendrick, *The Age of Big*, 128. Baltzell, *Puritan Boston*, 242. Widener, *Without Drums*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ See: Percy Moore Turner to Barnes, October 26, 1917, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA, and Barnes to Martin A. Ryerson, October 2, 1920, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁷⁹ Barnes to R.O. Bennett, 1925, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Johnson's advice on making an eventual bequest.¹⁸⁰ After 1906, when they were in contact, there is no doubt Barnes spent many hours in Johnson's home discussing his paintings. Johnson hosted friends and art contacts each Sunday, and extended an open invite to his friends to visit his home, even when he was not there.¹⁸¹

An examination of this understudied interaction between two creative collectors affords a new understanding of Barnes' emergence as a collector and reveals a solid foundation that gave him the tools to build a world-class art collection and to establish his unique educational institution with Dewey and others. In the end, Johnson didn't tutor and didn't teach. He did not tell Barnes what was good, or what to buy, but coached him on how to go about it. While the others helped to expand his knowledge of art, Johnson provided the frame for collecting and imparted a series of dispositions (cultivate judgment, seek out quality, and do your homework) and discursive practices (engage the public, design a deliberate collection, take exhibition seriously, and leave a detailed bequest with a public in mind) that shaped his legacy. These dispositions and practices are not uncommon traits for collectors individually, but sharing them all in total set the two men apart from their respective peers. Unpacking each of these will be the central activity of Chapter Four.

Dr. Barnes, The Collector We Know

Most studies (even brief summaries) of Barnes' life as a collector are organized

¹⁸⁰ Barnes to Johnson, June 22, 1912, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁸¹ Johnson to Price, February 3, 1917, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. "My house is open always, excepting on Sunday, and as there is no one in it but servants, all the rooms are accessible."

chronologically around several key points: early life and education, success with Argyrol, collecting with Glackens, collaborating with Dewey in establishing the Foundation, and spending the rest of his life defending his approach. This section will leave that chronological approach aside to focus on how traditional scholarship has positioned Barnes as collector. Rather than recounting a survey of the existing scholarship or weighing in on the controversy surrounding the move of the Collection to Center City, I will aim to discuss common perceptions of Dr. Barnes, especially his cantankerous manner and headstrong ways, and his unique approach to art education.

Many have judged Barnes as arrogant. Perhaps it was his antagonistic attitude, his constant need to define what he was against. For example, he made an effort in one of his earliest public articles on art in 1915 to position himself as a man of a new era, a modern collector distinct from those of the Gilded Age, when he referred to the “millionaire collections of Widener and Frick,” men who collected for status rather than a desire to educate the public.¹⁸² Likewise, he opposed traditional approaches to art appreciation, rooted in the study of art history, which stood between students and the work of art, claiming that his method could break down the barriers. Then in the 1920s, when he came to collaborate with American pragmatist John Dewey, whose ideas on art education theoretically informed his thinking, he positioned his Foundation against established museums. He espoused Dewey’s belief that the prevailing museum model, such as the one at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that followed European tradition set at the Louvre, ultimately separated art from life. Stated differently, Dewey and Barnes believed that artwork which was presented in an isolated way, so as to allow the viewer

¹⁸² Barnes, “How to Judge,” 248.

to focus on the object within the exhibition parameters set by these types of museums, removed it from the realm of everyday experience. They were intent on bringing that experience back in line with life outside of the refined world of the museum.

At the outset of the Foundation in 1922, Barnes had developed non-traditional methods of exhibition, renouncing arrangement according to chronology or region, the practice common to most major museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He championed the idea that great art was universal and that human emotion was more significant than particular social or historical conditions. In the preface to his first book, *The Art in Painting*, he claimed that his method “offers something basically objective to replace the sentimentalism, the antiquarianism, sheltered under the cloak of academic prestige, which make futile the present courses in art in universities and colleges generally.”¹⁸³ His distinctive wall compositions called “ensembles” were organized according to formal principles of light, line, color, and space. The viewer was invited to closely examine the works of art and consider the relationships between the objects themselves, as always, relying on one’s own judgment. A key target of this approach was reaching the working people of Philadelphia, those who were open to learning the skill of art appreciation, as in the experiment at his factory with his own workers. Decades later in a radio interview in 1942, Barnes was still emphasizing that the work of the Foundation was an extension of that earlier experiment.¹⁸⁴

His rhetoric aimed to preserve a sense of continuity with the original mission in an attempt to shape his legacy. This would have been critical at that time as he witnessed

¹⁸³ Albert C. Barnes, *The Art in Painting* (Merion Station, PA: Barnes Foundation Press, 2000), 29.

¹⁸⁴ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 15. Wattenmaker quotes a 1942 radio address.

the rise of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which over the 1930s and 1940s was engaged in experiments of its own on a much larger stage exploring several exhibition styles and mounting a series of influential shows that would set in place a definitive narrative of modernism for generations to come.¹⁸⁵ Over the course of the twentieth century, MoMA taught Americans how to interact with works of modernism and in the process became the magnet institution for discourse on modern art. According to art historian Alan Wallach, in what he refers to as its “utopian” period from 1929-1950, MoMA drew upon then current aesthetic discourses and “subjected heterogeneous set of material, e.g. El Lissitzky and Matisse, to the systematizing and taxonomical procedures that characterize the museum as a cultural institution.”¹⁸⁶ This included arranging works in gallery spaces according to media and style. In addition, the new building of 1939 set the standard for viewing art in rooms that were essentially white cubes, creating a new paradigm that allowed the viewer to detach the work from any outside context. This contrasted the more traditional spaces of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was modeled on the Louvre, with paintings exhibited against painted walls, often with rich wood panel throughout. During this period, the rapidly forming public for art rushed to a series of popular exhibitions, being effectively “instructed” by the experts at MoMA. Barnes method was at odds with the whole concept of expert knowledge and aimed to foster individual development based on specific principles mapped out in his experiential approach. Within the Foundation, a much more limited art viewing encountered ensemble

¹⁸⁵ Kristina Wilson, *The Modern Eye: Stieglitz, MoMA, and the Art of the Exhibition, 1925-1934* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 97-147.

¹⁸⁶ Alan Wallach, “The Museum of Modern Art: The Past's Future,” in *Exhibiting Contradiction Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 75.

displays that juxtaposed works of art from different periods and across media, mixing furniture and decorative arts.

Barnes was part of an emergent professional class in Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century that established a new paradigm for success based on achievement as opposed to inherited privilege. His tremendous wealth allowed him (and others) to impact the cultural life of the city in ways that were not possible in the past.¹⁸⁷ Early on, around the time he began collecting in the opening decade of the twentieth century, he seemed to want to be part of the shared movement to leave great art to the city. But later, around 1920, Barnes' frustration with the resistance of conservative Philadelphians to modern art drove him to imagine a new type of institution in order to re-think the relationship between art and the public. His accomplishments were born of hard work, quality education, and a talent for networking.

While he mostly kept himself busy with business matters and later with his own Foundation, to accomplish his goals as a collector, he maintained broad educational and art world contacts. Despite his reputation as a curmudgeon, he could be sociable, if not one for social clubs. He did like being a part of a team, evident from his association with the Narberth Fire Company and the small group of devotees he employed at the Foundation, but did not like professional organizations or committees.¹⁸⁸ Unlike Johnson, whose legal practice kept him constantly in the center of things, Barnes garnered public

¹⁸⁷ See Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 247. As a symbol of changing tides of old guard, Vanderbilt was refused a box at the Academy of Music so he and others, Gould, Vanderbilt, Morgan, Whitney, Baker and Rockefeller all contributed \$10,000 each to incorporate the Metropolitan Opera in 1880, the Academy was out of business by 1885.

¹⁸⁸ <http://narberthfirecompany.com/history>. Barnes contributed funds and sat on the Board in the 1930s and 1940s. Regarding professional organizations, there was a single reference in the archives for the Manufacturers' Club of Philadelphia, and that involved Barnes' resignation from the club in 1922.

attention primarily when advocating for a cause related to art, such as defending the exhibition of modern art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the opening of his Foundation, or publishing an article.

Then there is the complicated issue of his temperament, which kept others at bay. Fiske Kimball writes, “Before going to Philadelphia in 1925, I had heard something of Dr. Albert C. Barnes, the enfant terrible of American Collecting.”¹⁸⁹ It has been well documented how Barnes had trouble getting along with others. Gertrude Stein reportedly disliked Barnes and thought he was too pushy. She was not alone in that assessment. According to art historian Frances Weitzenhoffer, when Barnes hounded Louisine Havemeyer to buy her only Renoir, she replied, “Thank you, Dr. Barnes, when I need \$10,000, I’ll let you know.”¹⁹⁰ Barnes’ firm conviction in his own judgment and documented contempt for traditional scholarship set him at odds with much of the academic world. Despite this reputation he continually sought out and interacted with the key players in the world of modern art. He attended the Grafton Galleries exhibit and was delighted years later to talk with Roger Fry.¹⁹¹ He spent long hours listening to Alfred Stieglitz in his New York Gallery, and in Paris he bought from the best of his day, Joseph and George Durand-Ruel, Amboise Vollard, and Paul Guillaume. Barnes harnessed these myriad resources to the cause of creating the single best collection of Post-Impressionist Art any individual had amassed. As well, his sharp mind and ability to synthesize

¹⁸⁹ Writings and Research, Memoirs, Fiske Kimball Correspondence 1923-1926, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

¹⁹⁰ Frances Weitzenhoffer, *The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1986), 227.

¹⁹¹ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 63.

disparate sources led him to innovate the particular experience-based educational approach at his Foundation.

Barnes was a brilliant man who was often his own worst enemy. This is supported by a quick survey of his public and private writings, which reveal an opinionated ambitious individual who rarely held back. He was clearly skilled politically, yet remarkably impolitic when it really mattered. This is to say he excelled at networking and making use of connections from every aspect of his life, but in the end too often allowed personal differences to undermine desired outcomes. There are dozens of anecdotes that bear this out, including disputes with Henri Matisse, James Michener and Bertrand Russell, to name a few. His candid style of communication and bombastic rhetoric displayed a blistering intolerance for those who did not share his views, or worse, those who would waste his time. The “terrible tempered Dr. Barnes” had a knack for offending nearly everyone after a while, even those few who remained life-long friends, including Glackens and Dewey.¹⁹² He was aware of this tendency to self-sabotage, but never really learned to keep his temper in check. For example, in an earlier letter to Fiske Kimball, he praises art historian Dr. Thomas Munro while acknowledging his shortcomings as an advocate for his own cause, “His personality has none of the sharp edges which have cut into the art luminaries of this city as mine have done.”¹⁹³ His drive to succeed too often countervailed his long-term goals. This is most evident in his interest to partner with another educational institution in the city, most prominently the University of Pennsylvania. He initiated contact with his alma mater in the early 1920s after

¹⁹² Carl W. McCardle, “The Terrible-Tempered Dr. Barnes” *Saturday Evening Post* Vol. 214 Issue 40 (March 1942).

¹⁹³ Barnes to Fiske Kimball, October 5, 1925, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

establishing the Foundation, but never succeeded in maintaining a mutually beneficial and ongoing arrangement, despite several frustrating attempts over the next two decades.¹⁹⁴ Evidence of this struggle remains in a series of exchanges in 1926, when Dewey presciently warned him about contentious behavior: “If you pursue a too negative a policy you will find the Foundation isolated for educational purposes someday.”¹⁹⁵ As will be described in Chapter Five, this is how things eventually did play out; the Barnes Foundation never did establish a stable relationship with an institutional partner to shore up its academic credentials. Isolated from other institutions, in a perpetual war of words with anyone who came too close, Barnes was left to fund his own publications, teach courses on site at his Foundation, and carry on a limited conversation with those of his own circle.

I don’t intend to try to psychoanalyze the Doctor by looking for the source of his stubbornness and prickly affect in his struggle to overcome a difficult impoverished childhood, or the disappointment in his relationship with his father who returned from the Civil War disabled and dispirited. Still, the topic of his humble beginnings did feature regularly in his discussions of his own success and is cited by scholars to justify his interest in helping working men and women. Whatever else is true about Barnes, it is clear that rising out of poverty and entering Central High School was crucial to his success.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted from finding aides for Barnes Foundation Archives. Albert C. Barnes to Laurence Buermeyer, December 8, 1922, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 34. Note 134, Dewey to Barnes, April 15, 1926, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Barnes' mother pushed him to strive for Central. While there he came to believe that through hard work and discipline he could better his circumstances in life, spurred on by the example set for him by alumni and faculty who had gone on to great things. In addition to the aforementioned Johnson, Widener, and Eakins, and their influence on him as an art collector, we should consider the impact on Barnes of the aspiring scientists Edwin Houston, Elihu Thomson, and Edwin Wilbur Rice. Houston graduated from Central in 1864 and returned to teach physics. While there, he teamed up with two former students, Elihu Thomson and Edwin Wilbur Rice to design an arc light generator. They would leave Philadelphia and go on to create the Thomson-Houston Electric Company in 1879, which would eventually merge with the Edison General Electric Company to form General Electric in 1892. This outstanding achievement by men who had leveraged a high school education at Central must have been inspiring to Barnes who was in medical school at the University of Pennsylvania at that time.¹⁹⁶

In addition to the connection with Glackens and Sloan, he reached out to others, including Edgar Singer (graduated in 1890), Professor of Philosophy whom he enlisted to help forge a program with the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁹⁷ Like the best operators, Barnes tapped this network to expand his influence. If we frame his reconnecting with Glackens in this manner, we see it as a prime example of his skill for seeking out the

¹⁹⁶ William Hafner Cornog, *School of the Republic, 1893-1943: A Half-Century of the Central High School of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Alumni of Central High School, 1952).

¹⁹⁷ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 82. "The purpose of the foundation was to serve as a bridge between fellows like yourself, Dewey, Santayana, Russell, etc. and the well-meaning, well-endowed human beings who have never take you seriously." He told Singer about his factory-school experiment, and said: "All I want to do at Penn is to have that experience tried out further by people better trained than I was and to give the method a meaning by something concrete, like the intelligent study of paintings." Note 95: Barnes to Edgar A. Singer, January 25, 1925. *Josiah H. Penniman Papers*.

right people to help achieve his goals. In turn, Glackens, by way of Alfred Maurer, introduced Barnes to Leo Stein. The Stein's were "natural networkers," who in turn introduced him to Matisse and key dealers in Paris and New York.¹⁹⁸

In Philadelphia, Barnes has garnered more attention than other collectors whose contributions continue to be largely overlooked. This is due not only to the tremendous controversy surrounding control and relocation of the Collection around the turn of the twenty-first century, but also due to the fact that his "collection museum" survived intact, while the collections of others like John G. Johnson and P.A.B. Widener have been absorbed into larger museums, namely the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D. C. respectively. Despite the notoriety, Barnes' educational model was out of step with other arts institutions and he seemed to have no interest in working with anyone beyond the walls of the Foundation. Over time he increasingly abjured contact with the Philadelphia art establishment, grew more entrenched in his own unique methods, and left behind a rigid institution unfit to engage in substantive public discourse.

The agency of the collector can have a profound impact on public reception going forward. To emphasize this point, it is useful here to briefly contrast the approach of his contemporary Duncan Phillips, who provides a more appropriate example than John Quinn, or Lillie P. Bliss, who despite their public advocacy for Modern art did not leave behind any published works of art criticism or an individual collection legacy

¹⁹⁸ Janet Bishop, Cécile Debray, and Rebecca Rabinow, *The Steins Collect Matisse, Picasso, and the Parisian Avant-Garde* in conjunction with the exhibition, *The Steins Collect: Matisse, Picasso, and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (San Francisco, Calif: San Francisco Mus. of Modern Art, 2011).

institution.¹⁹⁹ The Phillips Collection opened in Washington D.C. in 1921, as the first institution dedicated to the collecting and display of Modern Art (specifically the work of living artists) beating Barnes by one year. Both men had established institutions that were intentionally not museums, one a foundation, the other a collection. They reveled in their outsider status, far from New York, as they pushed against the existing encyclopedic museum model in place at the much larger Metropolitan Museum of Art.²⁰⁰ The two men both published critical writings, but differed in two key areas related to their individual efforts to shape a public for modern art.²⁰¹ In the first instance, they both saw the need for new forms of exhibition and display. Both collectors chose to organize works not by chronology or region, preferring to focus on aesthetic principles related to formal properties like line and color. They arranged paintings according to personal taste as wall installations, which Barnes referred to as ensembles and Phillips as arrangements. Barnes was interested primarily in leading viewers to a richer response to the interrelated forms of art, in an effort to enhance their individual experience; Phillips was likewise interested in offering a richer view of an object, but was also more explicitly interested in garnering public response. For example, his “exhibition units” of his favorite artists, were offered to the public to assess if they would remain in the collection over time.²⁰² Along the same line of thought, Phillips’ gallery had a domestic setting, which was meant to be

¹⁹⁹ Quinn’s collection was sold off after his death and Bliss bequest her collection to the Museum of Modern Art.

²⁰⁰ Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist*, 3. For Phillips see: Phillips Collection and Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *Duncan Phillips Collects: Paris Between the Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Collection, 1991), 9.

²⁰¹ Duncan Phillips, “The Phillips Memorial Art Gallery,” *The Art Bulletin* 3 no. 4 (1921): 148-149.

²⁰² Phillips Collection, *The Phillips Collection in the Making, 1920-1930: A Traveling Exhibition* (Washington: The Service, 1979), 22.

comforting and social, possibly influenced by his relationship with Stieglitz at his Intimate Gallery in the 1920s, while Barnes more narrowly envisioned his galleries solely for education, preferring his visitors to be earnest and not necessarily at ease.²⁰³ These seemingly innocuous differences are symptomatic of how they differed in their efforts to engage the broader public. It is significant that over the course of the first half of the twentieth century as Barnes became increasingly isolated Phillips expanded his outreach to the Washington art community. He held conferences and talks in art appreciation for teachers and offered visual artists sessions in his studios.²⁰⁴ In addition, The Phillips Collection continued to collect and realign its mission with changing times, while the Barnes did not.

With Barnes' death in 1951, a devoted team of followers dutifully worked the gears of the modernist educational experiment; deprived of the agency of its founder, however, it coasted in a quirky closed loop, serving a narrow public of students, out of synch with the evolving art world beyond its walls. In addition to restricting access only to students enrolled in courses, the works of art could never be loaned, reproduced in a catalog, or even physically moved from their specific arrangement on the wall as part of a deliberate ensemble left by Barnes.²⁰⁵ In the end, Barnes effort to strictly control the

²⁰³ Sarah E. Greenough and William C. Agee, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 41. Describes Stieglitz as "midwife to a thousand ideas." Duncan Phillips, *The Artist Sees Differently; Essays Based Upon the Philosophy of A Collection in the Making* (New York City: E. Weyhe, 1931), 14. "Art is part of the social purpose of the world and a gallery can be a meeting place of many minds..." Kevin Grogan, "Duncan Phillips in the Context of Post World War I Washington," in *Phillips Collection The Phillips Collection in the Making, 1920-1930: A Traveling Exhibition*, ed. The Phillips Collection (Washington: The Service, 1979), 10.

²⁰⁴ Phillips, *The Artist Sees*, 3-14. Grogan, "Duncan Phillips," 10.

²⁰⁵ Myers, *Art, Education*, 300. Also see the Indenture of Trust.

Foundation after death left him open to challenges by ascendant publics with their own designs on what to do with his precious Collection.

CHAPTER 4 A SHARED APPROACH: DISPOSITIONS AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

The biographies of John G. Johnson and Albert C. Barnes overlap in remarkable ways. They were two accomplished art collectors from Philadelphia, both professionals, one a lawyer, the other a research chemist with a medical degree. They were educated, but not academics; passionate about art, but not humanists; mavericks, but not revolutionaries. They looked to the future by carefully designing legacy institutions with the general public in mind, but they were not populists. These were highly intelligent practical men who were extraordinarily successful in their chosen fields, and above all that, went on to make unlikely contributions to the shaping of publics around the exhibition of art in Philadelphia in the early twentieth century.

This chapter juxtaposes men who have each, in their way, been overlooked by history. Johnson has been remembered, in select circles, as a legendary Philadelphia attorney but nearly forgotten as a collector. During his life, his art-buying was unknown to his day-to-day colleagues, while after death, his legacy was obscured when his collection was subsumed into the larger Philadelphia Museum of Art in the 1930s.²⁰⁶ With Barnes the situation is reversed. During his lifetime, it was said of him, “no one has ever discovered precisely the line of demarcation between Barnes and the Barnes Foundation.”²⁰⁷ He is remembered, regionally at least, as a great collector, and not for his invention of the successful antiseptic Argyrol, which fell out of use after World War II due to the wide acceptance of antibiotics. In the end, the goal is not to resuscitate the

²⁰⁶ Higonet, *A Museum*, 5. “Many universal survey museums originated in personal collections but have expanded to such an extent that their origins are now invisible.”

²⁰⁷ McCardle, “The Terrible-Tempered,” 20.

reputations of these men, but to refocus attention on their shared ideas about art and its usefulness for the public, simultaneously elevating the pivotal importance of Johnson as a collector, while pulling Barnes into his generous shadow to provide a new perspective on the younger collector's legacy.

Johnson and Barnes were indeed birds of a feather with a shared cast of mind that influenced their approach to collecting. They embraced a series of dispositions and discursive practices, which set them apart from other collectors in their day. Here, the term disposition points to something stronger than a simple personality trait, indicating an inclination that is inherent in the individual. I have enumerated them here as action items to emphasize the agency of the individual: cultivate judgment, seek out quality, and do your homework. By employing the term discursive practices, I am pointing to a broad array of communicative forms designed to engage others in an attempt to construct meaning on a given topic. In this particular case of art collecting, especially pertaining to the display and criticism of fine art, mostly paintings, the discursive practices are: engage the public, design a deliberate collection, take exhibition seriously, and leave a detailed bequest with a public in mind. Naturally, one could argue for any number of peer collectors as having been attentive to one or more of these discursive practices, however, the combination of all four set Johnson and Barnes apart from the others.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ For example, Phillips published popular articles on art criticism; Widener and others published catalogs; Stewart-Gardner and Frick left detailed bequests with some sense of a public in mind.

Birds of a Feather

In the previous chapter, I established a basis for Albert Barnes to seek out John G. Johnson, first, as the best attorney by reputation, then as a seasoned and well-respected art collector. Barnes would have been able to easily reach out to Johnson due to their overlapping network of Central High School alumni. But here it is useful to consider more comprehensively what they had in common and how their affinity evolved in a relatively brief time span of around a dozen years, within the confines of the two square miles of Center City Philadelphia in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The point is not merely to identify coincidental biographical details, nor to suggest that they match perfectly (relationships don't generally work that way), but to offer correlative evidence that supports the idea that they would have been likely to work together and that the younger collector's vision of collecting was shaped by his mentor.

Both men grew up solidly working-class. Their fathers were tradesmen, one a blacksmith, the other a butcher, but they were much more strongly guided by their mothers. Their mothers were both active in the Methodist Church, and drove their sons to achieve academically. They remained in close contact with their mothers; Johnson dined with his mother every Friday throughout his adult life, while Barnes made mention of his affection for his mother in his letters.²⁰⁹ Coincidentally, both women died in 1912, Barnes' mother at age 66 in May, Johnson's mother at age 92 in December.

They were able to transcend their humble beginnings by passing the entrance exam to Central High School, where a self-selecting population of lower and middle class boys from Philadelphia was offered a high quality education to help them to climb the

²⁰⁹ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 98.

ladder of success. Though they were a generation apart, there are two key points regarding the educational approach at Central that groomed a certain type of young man, regardless of adjustments in curriculum that might occur over decades. The first involves the ethos of the school that was meant to drive competition and instill students with a sense of striving. In the foreword for *Eakins' Drawing Manual*, Kathleen Foster and Amy Beth Werbel wrote about the climate of success at the school: "Central's meritocratic structure relied on elaborate grading of its students, every day, for both achievement and behavior, a system that generated a precise ordering of students based on excellence rather than social position."²¹⁰ This regimen, where hard work pays off, was tailor made for serious young men like Johnson and Barnes, and undoubtedly inspired confidence in them to achieve. Both were reputed in their later working lives for their tireless dedication and focus that track back to their training at Central. One must bear in mind they were exceptional students; Johnson gave the honorary address at his graduation and was deemed "best boy" by his professors, earning him a highly sought after entry-level position in a Philadelphia law firm. Barnes was Vice President of his graduating class and was accepted into the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

The second point regards the importance of drawing in the curriculum. According to Werbel, "some type of drawing was included in every semester: first and second year students practiced writing and drawing, third and fourth year students learned perspective, mechanical drawing, and ornamental writing."²¹¹ As was mentioned in Chapter Two, at Central High, our young collectors benefitted from the legacy of

²¹⁰ Thomas Eakins, Kathleen A. Foster, and Amy Beth Werbel, *A Drawing Manual* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2005), 39.

²¹¹ Amy Beth Werbel, *Central High School Alumni Exhibition, April 14-July 7, 2002* (Philadelphia, Pa: Woodmere Art Museum, 2002), 6.

Rembrandt Peale, the first art teacher, appointed in 1840. His textbook, *Graphics, the Art of Accurate Delineation A System of School Exercise, for the Education of the Eye and the Training of the Hand, As Auxiliary to Writing, Geography, and Drawing*, remained in use through their time at the school. Neither collector created fine art, but undoubtedly graduated with a sense of the fundamental importance of art in life. There was a trend in nineteenth-century education in Europe to teach basic drawing as a required skill, a key to understanding how the world worked. This was evident in the applied arts approach of the museum established at South Kensington, opened in 1857, later to become the Victoria and Albert Museum. Similarly, in *Their Common Sense* (2000), art historian Molly Nesbit investigates the shared educational background of Modern French artists, which included required drawing courses in their schooling as part of a curriculum called the Ferry Plan.²¹²

While the study of drawing at Central was pragmatic, aimed at providing young men with tools to help them to be productive in industry and professional life, it arguably offered more. Peale, along with Alexander Dallas Bache, the first president of the school, believed that careful instruction in both drawing and writing had both a moral influence on young minds and offered “advantages in every business of life.”²¹³ This type of thinking featured prominently in the teachings of the influential artist and writer John Ruskin, who like Peale, saw moral value in the study and creation of art. For Johnson and

²¹² Molly Nesbit, *Their Common Sense* (London: Black Dog Pub, 2000), 22-29.

²¹³ Rembrandt Peale, *Graphics, the Art of Accurate Delineation A System of School Exercise, for the Education of the Eye and the Training of the Hand, As Auxiliary to Writing, Geography, and Drawing* (Philadelphia: E.C. & J. Biddle, 1854), 3. Elizabeth Johns, “Drawing instruction at Central High School and its impact on Thomas Eakins,” *Winterthur Portfolio* (n.d. 15 2): 139.

Barnes, the education they received at Central afforded them the distinct opportunity to share in this broader educational trend.

Beyond the network of individuals that stayed with them throughout their lives (including the close friendships of Johnson and Widener, Barnes and Glackens), experiences at Central High shaped their activities as collectors in two significant and interrelated ways: instilling a competitive drive to excel, and cultivating a sense of gratitude. The latter ultimately inspired them to facilitate opportunities for others to thrive, mainly by including the working men and women of Philadelphia in the design of their respective legacy institutions. Surely, their education at Central built upon the Protestant work ethic instilled in them by supportive families. In addition to being precocious and highly intelligent young men, Johnson and Barnes had the privilege of being white, educated, and male, which may have mattered even more in the closing decades of the century than it does today. Moreover, they capitalized on these advantages through hard work and self-cultivation. Johnson famously trained his memory to recall the complete works of Shakespeare, while a recent work by art historian Robin Veder claims that Barnes was a devotee of the Alexander Technique, a practice related to self-awareness of the interconnectedness of mind and body.²¹⁴

They benefited from professional training in law and medicine that demanded long hours of patient and attentive study, as they learned to absorb and analyze complex texts, and to utilize logic to test their ideas in practice. Their respective trades encouraged a sense of gamesmanship. They were both driven to compete to win. In addition, as professionals, and men of wealth, they benefitted from, and were accustomed to, dramatic

²¹⁴ Robin Veder, *The Living Line: Modern Art and the Economy of Energy* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2015).

changes in technology in their lifetimes, which would prove useful in the world of collecting. These included new tools of communication—transatlantic wires, telephone calls, and accessible modes of transportation, such as transatlantic voyages, streetcars, and automobiles. The cost of doing business came down to the point where professionals could leverage these; for example, in the 1860s, a message by wire cost \$10 per word, but by 1888 was down to 25 cents, while in the same time frame, a transatlantic voyage was halved from roughly ten days to six days.²¹⁵

In terms of gratitude, they carried forward the idea that if offered a chance, as they were, anyone might succeed. While he never publicly espoused populist rhetoric, Johnson's actions point to his dedication to helping others. He was widely recognized as accessible to the needs of working men and women. "Increasingly the word among storekeepers, realtors, builders, and many middle-class men and women was, you had better see Johnson."²¹⁶ Throughout his career, he was reputed to charge clients on a sliding scale, according to what they could afford. There are a host of anecdotes of him keeping powerful clients, such as J.P. Morgan, at bay while attending to the needs of a low-paying client. Francis Lynde Stetson wrote of Johnson, after his death in 1917, in a letter to the editor of the *Evening Post*, "Once convinced of a man's sincerity he would go to any length to render him needed assistance. This was the key to his heart, and to his acceptance of the poor man's cause with little or no fee as readily as that of the wealthy

²¹⁵ John Robert McNeill and William Hardy McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 218. Peter James Hugill, *World Trade Since 1431: Geography, Technology and Capitalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 128.

²¹⁶ Robert R. Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer: A History, 1735-1945* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992), 181.

suitor.”²¹⁷ Here we glimpse a moral calculus that can be extended to his interest in sharing his collection with the citizens of Philadelphia. In his bequest, Johnson insisted that his collection be open to the general public, and believed his home was a suitable location for his collection museum in full knowledge that others considered the thoroughfare on south Broad Street to be unsuitable due to its large immigrant population. At the same time Stetson also reported that Johnson saw the “multitude as mostly fools.” This could be merely the affect of the attorney’s well-documented grouchy-friendly persona, but in the aggregate, points to a complicated historical figure who sincerely hoped to share his love of art with all men equally, if they would apply themselves. Yet he was resigned to the fact that there would be others who could not be helped.²¹⁸

Barnes’ sympathies for working people are more evident, having been on display in his educational experiment at his factory and then explicitly outlined in the mission of his Foundation to educate those who were largely denied access to any form of cultural education, especially African Americans. He later wrote in the *New Republic*:

What we believe our experiment indicates is that great things of creation, in art, literature and thinking, can be resolved to fundamentals of human nature and in simple form be so presented that they may be grasped by plain, even illiterate, people to the point of the particular person’s capacity.²¹⁹

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, his outreach to working people might be applauded. Still, one can reasonably question the viability of such a mission when the courses were scheduled during weekday hours on the Main Line, an upscale suburb of

²¹⁷ Francis Lynde Stetson, letter to editor, *The Evening Post*, New York, April 14, 1917.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Albert C. Barnes, “The Barnes Foundation,” *New Republic*, (March 14, 1923): 66.

Philadelphia, coupled with a policy that denied public access to anyone not enrolled in courses at the Foundation. There are other isolated rhetorical missteps that weaken claims to Barnes's populist credentials. He reportedly fought a plan to build low income housing nearby claiming it "would ultimately bring the city slums" to the Foundation doors and render his artistic work impossible."²²⁰ And in a court case in 1931 he gave testimony in which he claimed, "His gallery was no place for the rabble."²²¹ Yet, like his mentor, he must be viewed as a man of his times, and in the end an assessment of his actions reveals a passionate commitment to provide the opportunity to those less fortunate who were willing to make the effort. Barnes continually made this point with his usual wit, e.g. "Aimless wandering in a gallery is about on par with the day-dreaming furnished by attendance at the movies."²²²

In addition to their background at Central, the motivation of these collectors to enrich the cultural lives of the common man can be understood as part of a broader moral movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, and into the early twentieth century, to educate the poor. As autodidacts in matters of culture, both men were active readers. Of note, in their respective vast libraries, they held books by Ruskin. Bernard Berenson, close advisor to Johnson, was a student of Ruskin's teachings by way of Charles Eliot Norton of Harvard University.²²³ Ruskin taught at the Working Men's College in London, from 1854-1860, where he aimed to offer students something more

²²⁰ McCardle, "The Terrible-Tempered," 66.

²²¹ Myers, *Art, Education*, 168.

²²² Albert C. Barnes, "Barnes Explains Why the Barnes Foundation Has Never Been Opened to the Public," *Art Digest* 12:13 (March 15, 1938): 13.

²²³ Theodore E. Stebbins and Virginia Anderson, *The Last Ruskinians: Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Herbert Moore, and Their Circle* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Art Museums, 2007), 24.

than the merely practical approach of drawing taught in Mechanics' Institutes, which had tailored to expand the skills of craftsmen (also popular in America).²²⁴ Ruskin saw a more fundamental value of art to a good life. He reports advising students "not to learn in the hope of being anything but working men, but to learn what may be either advantageous for them in their work, or make them happy after their work."²²⁵ This resonates with Johnson and Barnes' shared interest in the study of art as a means to enhance one's life, not as a path to social betterment. Later under the influence of Dewey, Barnes would be interested in how paintings and knowledge of art might connect in some way to the daily activities of life.²²⁶

There were multiple adult education projects across America offering enrichment by way of lectures and other forms of entertainment, such as lyceums and the Chautauqua movement, which flourished after the Civil War. In particular in Philadelphia, there were many initiatives specifically targeted to assist and educate the poor. This trend had been building over the course of the nineteenth century in the wake of the great social changes that accompanied the industrialization of America. With the growing chasm between rich and poor many wealthy Americans were morally compelled to help those less fortunate. Merchants John Wanamaker and John B. Stetson co-founded the Sunday Breakfast

²²⁴ Stebbins, *The Last Ruskinians*, 22. "Ruskin believed deeply in the power of museums to affect taste and to improve the quality of life for people of all classes." The authors also refer us to Ruskin's Guild of St. George, founded in 1871, to educate the working man. Ruskin wrote a series of pamphlets directed toward the working men and women of England in the 1870s under the title of *Fors Clavigera* attesting to his lifelong commitment in the moral education of working people.

²²⁵ Evidence of John Ruskin to Committee on Public Institutions (London: Everyman Library, n.d.), 113. For more on actual instruction see: Ray, Haslam, "Looking, Drawing and Learning with John Ruskin at the Working Men's College," *Journal of Art & Design Education* (1988 7 no. 1): 65-79.

²²⁶ Ueno Masamichi, *Democratic Education and the Public Sphere: Towards John Dewey's Theory of Aesthetic Experience* (London: Routledge, 2016), 112.

Rescue Mission in 1878, which still serves Philadelphians who find themselves homeless, offering meals and resources to better their current position by way of training and education. Russell Conwell, the founder of Temple University, offered night courses to working men and women as early as 1884, while Samuel Fleisher sponsored free art classes to children beginning in 1898, at what was later known as the Graphic Sketch Club, and eventually renamed the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial.

In addition to education, there existed a culture of collecting in Philadelphia around the turn of the 20th century.²²⁷ Historically, many have noticed the healthy state of Philadelphia art collecting at that time, including art critics, and advisors to Johnson, Bernard Berenson and Roger Fry, who enthusiastically compared Philadelphia to cities of the Renaissance.²²⁸ Later in the 1920s, Barnes seemed to share their ambitious outlook as he wrote to the Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, Josiah Penniman, “One thing is sure that no human power can stop Philadelphia from becoming the only place in the world where...art can be adequately studied objectively and scientifically.”²²⁹

For many, including Johnson, Widener, William L. Elkins, A.J. Drexel, and Wannamaker, the exhibition of art at the 1876 Centennial Exposition was a source of inspiration. An annotated copy of the catalogue is held in his library at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.²³⁰ In its wake, buyers became active in the 1880s, although this was also

²²⁷ An expanded view of this period will be the topic of the symposium, “Have to Have It: Philadelphians Collect, 1850-1930,” co-sponsored by the History of Collecting at the Frick Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in November 2017.

²²⁸ Fry to Johnson, August 21, 1909, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²²⁹ Myers, *Art, Education*, 70.

²³⁰ Philadelphia Museum of Art, *John G. Johnson: Collector of Contemporary Art* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Dec. 17, 1988-Mar. 26, 1989).

due to an expanding art market and increasing number of galleries and art auctions.

Johnson exponentially increased his purchases in that decade and was at the center of a swarm of collectors, many of which he is reputed to have advised, including Widener, Elkins, Yerkes, and Barnes.²³¹ The boom was bracketed by the opening of the Pennsylvania Museum in 1877 at Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park, and the rebranding of the museum in a grand neoclassical temple structure perched atop the hill overlooking Center City in 1928, which would be renamed the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

During the first three decades of the 20th century, 110 new museums opened across America, so naturally Philadelphia was eager to compete with other cities.²³² Collectors were key to the development of these many civic institutions. According to art historian Steven Conn, in the process of planning, Eli K. Price, commissioner of Fairmount Park, had his eye on large collections in Philadelphia that might be willed to the museum.²³³ Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Johnson was appointed to the Fairmount Park Commission in 1895, which thus provided him with firsthand knowledge of the long struggle to establish a new building in Fairmount. While the details of Johnson's bequest will be unraveled in Chapter Five, it had been publicly reported as early as 1906 that his collection might be included, along with those of Widener and Elkins. Two years later in 1908 he wrote to Berenson, "As for me All my pictures will go

²³¹ "He was constantly consulted by the late Peter A.B. Widener, W.L. Elkins and others collectors of this city, and also by those in New York and elsewhere, and he was always ready to give good and sound counsel." "John Graver Johnson Collection," *American Art News* 15 (April 21, 1917): 2. There were other lesser known collectors of objects other than fine art, whom Johnson may have been in contact with, such as Central alumni, Alba B. Johnson, (graduated 1875) and John Frederick Lewis (graduated 1879).

²³² Gorman Beauchamp, "Henry James vs. the Robber Barons," *The American Scholar* 75, no. 2 (2006): 100.

²³³ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 222.

to the local Museum.”²³⁴ However, it was evident by 1914 that he did not like the way the plans were heading. John Frederick Lewis, Philadelphia lawyer and collector, wrote to Price in 1914 to warn him about a conversation he had with Johnson:

He said that the building would be an architect’s monument rather than a suitable place in which to display pictures, that the amount to be expended for it was out of all proportion, and that a building to show pictures should have low ceilings and be otherwise fitted for that purpose. He said he would never permit his pictures to be shown in the Gallery and that a building to display his 1200 canvases upon which he had spent about \$4,000,000 should cost about \$250,000.²³⁵

Despite his later misgivings, for three decades, Johnson assisted in strengthening the museum’s holdings of European paintings by overseeing all purchases made in the name of the Wilstach Collection. The bequest made by William P. and Anna Wilstach, a dealer in saddles and hardware for carriages, and his wife in 1893, included funds to continue collecting in their name. Well-respected for his knowledge of the art market, Johnson diligently bought both for himself and the fund. Barnes was aware of Johnson’s work on the Wilstach and even offered to donate paintings in 1912.²³⁶

²³⁴ Johnson to Berenson, October 21, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²³⁵ Berenson to Johnson, November 21, 1906, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. Berenson writes, “That will make from the art historian’s point of view at least, the most interesting collection in the country.” John Frederick Lewis to Eli K. Price, October 21, 1914, Cataloged Correspondence, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Dorothy and Kenneth Woodcock Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

²³⁶ Barnes offered offering three paintings by Maurer, Lawson and Glackens with “no hook” attached to the anonymous gift. Johnson declined because they were works of living American artists and did not fit what he was collecting at the time. Barnes to John G. Jonson, September 20, 1912, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

It is surprising that with their great success and prominent achievements, neither man welcomed the social trappings of wealth. More typically, new money chases the old, as might be claimed of the likes of Stewart-Gardner and Frick, who spent a great deal of time and money hosting high society parties at fabulously appointed mansions. Yet, while Johnson and Barnes spent a fortune on art and travel, they lived relatively modest lives and were often dismissive of privilege. They were part of the rising professional class, and not from prominent Philadelphia families. They were social outsiders, at least in terms of the social register, but with a key distinction: Johnson had access to society and Barnes was never accepted. Johnson married into society in 1885 and that same year was admitted to the prestigious Philadelphia Club. In addition to his marriage, according to Baltzell, the welcoming of Johnson into Philadelphia's élite might have also been the result of his rising reputation as a well-regarded attorney in the city.²³⁷ Despite this acceptance, it is widely reported that he preferred baseball and boxing, and famously skipped social occasions altogether. Unlike his mentor who could pass between the two worlds, Barnes did not marry into society, and as an entrepreneur who advocated constantly for his own interests, he lacked the reputation of service, and frankly the social graces, of Johnson. As was noted in the previous chapter, Barnes was often his own worst enemy in his inability to reign in his emotional responses when challenged on almost any issue, especially in public. He was notorious for his rough handling of perceived opponents throughout his life. Critic Arthur Danto summed this up, "Barnes's personality, moreover, was defined by a degree of irascibility so outside the common

²³⁷ Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, 348. Bell also mentions that his professional achievements would have led to his invitation to the club. Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer* 185.

measure that his crusade for esthetic education was accompanied by an obligato of fits and tantrums comically disproportionate to their many occasions.”²³⁸ Beyond this, and even more damning, Fiske Kimball wrote, in an unpublished memoir, that Barnes’ rather bad reputation in Philadelphia was due to perceptions that he had betrayed his partner Hille and exploited African-American workers, “The Businessmen downtown would not speak to him, saying he had made his fortune dishonestly.”²³⁹

Five years after Johnson’s death, Barnes wrote to his attorney Owen Roberts, “I felt when I was done with you like I used to when Mr. Johnson was alive and had fixed me up personally, I missed the picturesque, stevedore profanity he practically always handed out to me—but, we can’t have everything.”²⁴⁰ On the whole, the two men seemed to embrace their rough edges. They were more comfortable at a poker table than one set for fine dining. It is not hard to imagine that while they were equally known to use profanity, in Johnson’s case it was seen as colorful and perhaps even endearing, while on Barnes it was appalling. Of the former, Winkelman wrote, “His picturesque profanity became tradition in the city.”²⁴¹ Philadelphia lawyer and banker, George W. Norris, wrote that “Johnson was very profane, and did not modify his language to suit his client, but his profanity was so wholehearted and good-natured that it was never offensive.”²⁴² This sadly is not true for Dr. Barnes, whom art historian John Rewald referred to as the “not so

²³⁸ Arthur C. Danto, review of *The Devil and Dr. Barnes*, by Howard Greenfeld, *The New York Times*, November 22, 1987.

²³⁹ Sidney Fiske Kimball, *Writings and Research*, Memoirs, Fiske Kimball Correspondence 1923-1926, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁴⁰ Barnes letter to Owen Roberts December 9, 1922, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

²⁴¹ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 159.

²⁴² George Washington Norris, *Ended Episodes* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937).

noble buyer.”²⁴³ He was notorious for his outspoken behavior and for his “penchant for blunt and bawdy language.”²⁴⁴ McCardle confirmed that Barnes took pride telling listeners what “pictures were all about in the forthright speech of a bricklayer.”²⁴⁵ The effect was to enhance an aura of terribilità such that one traveller to the States reported back home, “You can have no idea of the effect the name of Barnes has on anyone in New York or Philadelphia before whom it is uttered.”²⁴⁶

Over the span of a few decades Johnson and Barnes lived and worked in the same dozen, or so, square blocks of Center City Philadelphia. As a high school senior, Barnes would have walked right past Johnson’s home and office on his way to Central High up Broad Street. Johnson would have walked right by Barnes’ first factory on his way to lunch at the Philadelphia Club at 13th and Walnut. In the years when Barnes first encountered Johnson, his mentor faced myriad struggles that left him in a pensive and reflective mood regarding his life and legacy. He lost his wife in 1908 and his mother in 1912. He watched his best friend, Peter Widener, rapidly decline in health and succumb to despair, after losing his first-born son and grandson on the Titanic in 1912. He was frequently slowed down by an old injury to his leg that kept him from walking for days. His letters revealed that he was in turmoil over American politics and the coming of War in Europe. On top of all this, he faced the greatest embarrassment of his collecting life, when it turned out that a pair of Dutch dealers, Leo Nardus and Michel van Gelder

²⁴³ Rewald, *Cézanne and America*, 263-279. Rewald used this term to contrast with Judith Zilcher’s description of John Quinn as “The Noble Buyer.”

²⁴⁴ Myers, *Art, Education*, 25.

²⁴⁵ McCardle, “The Terrible-Tempered,” 20.

²⁴⁶ Roger Hinks and Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith, *Pictures and People: A Transatlantic Criss-cross Between Roger Hinks in London and Naomi Royde-Smith (Mrs. Ernest Milton) in New York, Boston, Philadelphia During the Months of January, February, March in the Year 1930* (London: Gollancz, 1930), 245.

between 1908-1911, had been pedaling fakes. Johnson was not the only one—Widener, Morgan, M.C.D. Borden and William C. Van Horne were also stung—but the affair shook his confidence. In his letters he seemed most concerned with helping Widener to be made whole again.²⁴⁷ According to historian, Jonathan Lopez, “Johnson would long regret having introduced Nardus and Van Gelder to his circle of friends.”²⁴⁸ The entire episode fortified his drive to rely on his own judgment, increased his distrust of dealers, and surely would have tempered advice he would offer to a tyro collector.

Dispositions

Barnes was mentored by Johnson and embraced a series of dispositions he admired in the more accomplished collector, which aligned with his own latent tendencies. This section will parse them out in detail, focusing strongly on the source of each disposition as traced back to Johnson.

1) Cultivate Judgment

The two men were famous for relying on their own judgment; however, this did not translate to a disregard of expert knowledge. Johnson modeled for Barnes how to carefully leverage expert opinion as a means to cultivate judgment. From his training in the law, Johnson knew that one might gain knowledge upon careful reading and

²⁴⁷ Johnson to Van Gelder, January 4, 1909, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. “It is with Mr. W.’s matter that I am interested and I want to see him put right. When he is dealt with satisfactorily, you may consider the episode closed as regards myself.”

²⁴⁸ Jonathan Lopez, “Gross False ‘Pretences’: The Misdeeds of Art Dealer Leo Nardus,” *Apollo* 347 (December 2007): 83.

researching, but it is only through discussion with others, and by way of active practice, that a sense of judgment is developed. According to legal historian Robert Bell, Johnson emerged at a time when the law was learned by doing. And above and beyond, Johnson spent time after work, at the Law Academy at the University of Pennsylvania, voluntarily in moot courts to gain more practice with broad principles.²⁴⁹ Barnes would have also been familiar with this type of training from his own experience in medical school, in addition to the tireless trial and error as a research chemist in the laboratory. He would have been amenable to the idea that to accomplish a goal, there is no way around putting in the work.

A key to developing judgment is experiencing art up close. Johnson did not treat art like an investment, although he was well aware of how much he had spent and planned on leaving it as a bequest.²⁵⁰ For him, viewing paintings was not a diversion, he followed baseball and read detective novels for that. Over the course of the late 1870s, and through the 1880s, he spent more time on attending art museums and galleries during his summer trips to Europe when the courts were closed. In two photo journals he gifted to his wife, Ida Powell, from summers of 1878 and 1881, we see a significant increase in photographs of works of art. Both books feature high quality photos of tourist sites, e.g. Notre Dame, the Tuileries, and works of art. Of some 500 photos from the 1878 trip less than 10% of the images were works of art, while in 1881 the percentage had increased to

²⁴⁹ Bell, *The Philadelphia Lawyer*, 179. See also, Hampton Carson, *John G. Johnson, Esq. An Address Delivered at the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting, Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania, June 27, 1917*. Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 21.

²⁵⁰ Johnson to Berenson, October 21, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. "As they represent \$1,700,000 in cash paid and, I do not feel like taking from my family any more."

30%. Johnson's interest in attending galleries and museums inspired him to write a short book of art criticism in 1892, *Sightseeing Among Pictures*, recounting a week of his art travels in Berlin and Holland. There was a significant increase in correspondence with galleries both in Europe and New York over this time period, but he would not assemble his team of experts until the first decade of the 20th century.

Many collectors were content to leave judgment to the experts. Over time, Johnson chose to engage with experts and learn from them. He gathered around him the top minds in the fields he was collecting: Bernard Berenson, R. Langton Douglas and Herbert Horne on Italian painting, Roger Fry on British and European art, Wilhelm von Bode and Max J. Friedlander on German art, and Abraham Bredius, Wilhelm Valentiner, and Georges Hulin de Loo on Netherlandish art. Men like Morgan, Frick and Widener gathered some of these same men around them, but as businessman, delegated authority, choosing to rely on others to tell them what to buy, and therefore, while they learned how to play the market, they did not endeavor to assess quality.

Johnson's analytical mind might have facilitated placing works of art into groups and categories that would have made given him an advantage over fellow collectors. He poured over art journals and auction catalogs and had a remarkable ability to recall what he read and saw. When he turned his attention to the old masters around the turn of the twentieth century he began to seek out expert opinion and came in contact with Berenson and Fry. These men would help him to refine his aesthetic sense and provide a consistent vocabulary to develop his skills. Interestingly, Fry had studied under Berenson. Many scholars have cited Berenson's interest in careful study by way of methods adapted from

art historian Giovanni Morelli as a source for Fry's later interest in formalism.²⁵¹ In *Florentine Painters* (1894), Berenson introduces the idea of tactile values, which involved the fundamental experience of form; he goes on to cite form as the principal source of aesthetic enjoyment.²⁵² He had left behind the teachings of Ruskin and found inspiration in the effusive aesthetically focused writings of English critic Walter Pater.²⁵³ There is a convergence here of theorists as we realize that Berenson and Fry both read Morelli and Pater, and Johnson and Barnes read all four. Johnson built upon his already formidable experience in looking and discussing paintings. He was in agreement with Berenson's warning away from judging a painting by the dramatic presentation of its content; on more than one occasion he stated his lack of interest in the subject of a painting.²⁵⁴ Berenson delighted in Johnson's facility with art historical parlance in a way others collectors, excepting his mentee Stewart-Gardner, lacked. Perhaps this points to a latent interest in formalism that would have impressed Barnes.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Johnson began corresponding closely with Roger Fry. It is not clear when the two men met, but Fry began advising Johnson on purchases in 1905.²⁵⁵ The two men spent time touring art galleries together in London in summer 1906. Correspondence verifies at least one visit by Fry to Johnson's home in December 1907, but it is likely there were others. Fry was involved in almost every aspect of the Johnson Collection, even restoring two prominent paintings for him, *The*

²⁵¹ Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2002).

²⁵² Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 68.

²⁵³ Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr*, 44.

²⁵⁴ Michael, Fried, *Another Light Jacques-Louis David to Thomas Demand* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 198.

²⁵⁵ Roger Fry and Christopher Reed, *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 94-95.

Mocking of Christ now attributed to a follower of Hieronymus Bosch, and the Jan van Eyck, *St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata*.²⁵⁶ Johnson's letters reveal a man who was exchanging ideas with peers. We get a glimpse into his process by examining sections of three letters regarding a painting of *Leda and the Swan* that he was considering buying.²⁵⁷ First we read him assessing expert opinion from multiple perspectives:

Valentiner said, and I thought Friedlander concurred, though he said very little, that the landscape did seem to be a Flemish landscape, but that, so far as he had an opinion about it, the execution was not by a Flemish artist.²⁵⁸

Then we read his letter to the dealer Spiridon in which he offers his perspective:

I do not believe that the attribution to Leonardo will be accepted and I think if I purchased the picture I would have to rest upon its artistic merit without being able to claim it as coming from Leonardo saving at the expense of discrediting other attributions in my collection.²⁵⁹

Then in a remarkable follow up letter, he addresses matters of iconography and provenance, and ends with visual analysis.

I have been making some examination of the subject of "Leda and the Swan." I find that there are in existence two well-known variations of the paintings. One of these is in the Borghese Gallery. The other was sold at Christies in London in 1895, at the Doetsch sale...it originally belonged to the Marquis of Hastings...It was a fine picture. "Leda and the Swan" were depicted almost identically with your picture. They stood under, and in

²⁵⁶ Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 96. *Mocking of Christ* was first paintings to enter collection on Fry's advice. He had written about it in Burlington magazine two years earlier.

²⁵⁷ Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 100. Saarinen mentioned this exchange in general terms.

²⁵⁸ Johnson to Berenson, May 24, 1910, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁵⁹ Johnson to L. de B. Spiridon Esq., n.d., John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

front of, a large tree. In the background was a river scene entirely different from the one in your painting, but finely rendered...²⁶⁰

John Rewald has noted that Johnson learned to separate taste from judgment. In other words, Johnson could set aside his personal preferences in art when judging the quality of a painting. It was this skill that earned him a seat on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1910. Johnson displays this skill in one of his many letters to the President of the Board, Robert W. deForest:

Whilst the Impressionist Art does not appeal very strongly to me, I recognize that this is a mere matter of individual taste, and that it does appeal very strongly to very many connoisseurs of the highest taste and best judgment.²⁶¹

As he matured, rather than quibbling with dealers, he must have preferred speaking to men like Roger Fry on an academic level. Fry must have preferred it as well, rather than dealing with J.P. Morgan, President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1904-1913, and his boss, of whom he complained often to Johnson. "The trouble is that everybody is under the coercion of Mr. M's dominating will."²⁶² His esteem for Johnson is clear in the way he seeks his opinion, not in legal, but art matters.

I have been organizing a show of quite Modern French Art at the Grafton Galleries. I wonder what you would say to it - Cezanne, Van Gogh,

²⁶⁰ Johnson to L. de B. Spiridon Esq., n.d., John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁶¹ Letter from Johnson to R.W. deForest quoted in John Rewald, *Cézanne and America*, 204.

²⁶² Johnson to Fry, December 21, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

Gauguin. I find these people quite in key with the most primitive art - in fact they are becoming Byzantine, hence my sympathy.²⁶³

As for Barnes, he leveraged expert opinion to help him to see art differently. As was outlined in the previous chapter, Barnes began collecting Barbizon landscapes, and after he had been in contact with Johnson, sought out the help of William Glackens in 1912.²⁶⁴ By his own account, Barnes read voraciously at this time and dedicated himself fully to learning how to look at modern paintings.²⁶⁵ He travelled to Europe later that year by himself, which would be the first of many visits. In this brief span of time, he successfully befriended Leo Stein, visited key Paris dealers Durand-Ruel and Ambroise Vollard, and attended the second Post-Impressionist exhibition in London curated by Roger Fry. Back home, he attended the Armory Show and became a regular at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Gallery. This remarkable period of development occurred before Johnson's passing in 1917, thereafter, Barnes would go on to enlist the wisdom of others, not the least of which are John Dewey and Paul Guillaume.

By 1915, Barnes had published his first article on the topic of judgment itself, "How to Judge a Painting," wherein he seems to denigrate expertise, "The standard so-called authoritative works are, for the most part, compilations of the traditions and accretions that surround art, barely touching it, written by antiquarians, experts, bad

²⁶³ Roger Fry to Johnson, Oct 15, 1910, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁶⁴ Stanley Meisler, "Say What They Say, the Feisty Doctor Had an Artful Eye," *Smithsonian* 24 no. 2 (May, 1993): 96-108. "Not sure at first of his judgment, he called on a high school classmate and baseball teammate, the artist William J. Glackens."

²⁶⁵ Barnes to Johnson, June 22, 1912, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA. "...After studying the matter in collections and from various books (Meier-Graefe, Holmes, etc.)"

painters, professional writers or plain dunces.”²⁶⁶ However, a careful read reveals that Barnes was more interested in attacking not expertise itself, but accepted opinion, the unexamined position. In fact, it could be argued that his entire approach to art education centered on helping others to develop judgment. Regarding his later Foundation, art historian Richard Wattenmaker wrote, “Barnes saw his school as a laboratory for students’ experiments, as participant-observers, in perception and judgment.”²⁶⁷

Like Johnson, Barnes was a voracious reader and despite the fact that his library was sold off to a private collector with no definitive extant catalog, we have enough breadcrumbs to know what he was reading. True to form, while he acknowledges critics he engaged with, including Berenson and Fry, he eventually got around to criticizing them and disavowing any contribution to his eventual method. For example, while he claims that he studied Berenson’s work as he moved through the galleries of Europe, he found the connoisseurial approach failed to make a connection with the creative process of the artist. While he indeed gained an admiration for the Italian primitives, it was because he saw directness in the approach of the artist that reminded him of modern art, not because of some detailed art historical analysis.²⁶⁸ Yet several scholars have pointed to the importance of Berenson’s concept of tactile values for Fry’s later ideas on formalism and Clive Bell’s idea of significant form, which grew out of discussions with Fry.²⁶⁹ Barnes mentioned both of these critics in his early writings and we can see his

²⁶⁶ Albert C. Barnes, “How to Judge a Painting,” *Arts and Decoration* (April 1915): 248-250.

²⁶⁷ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 39.

²⁶⁸ Rudenstine, *The House of*, 98. Quotes Barnes as referring to Berenson’s “Sherlock Holmes-Type” method.

²⁶⁹ Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 130. Barnes excerpted texts from Bell and Fry from the Grafton Catalogue in an introduction of Maurer show in 1912

struggle over the second decade of the century as he gained enough confidence to push against theorists to claim his own space. According to Rudenstine, Barnes became a part of an important discussion on the merits of a formalist critical approach due to his prominence as a prominent collector and advocate of Post-Impressionist paintings, but the parameters of that entire discussion were set by Fry.²⁷⁰ As will be discussed in the next chapter, Fry was also important for Dewey in terms of separating art from everyday life. So while Barnes' formalist approach borrows greatly from Fry and Bell it would be the addition of Dewey's pragmatism and experiential approach that distinguish his educational method.

2) Seek Out Quality (never overpay)

In an obituary in *Burlington Magazine* Fry summed up his measure of Johnson compared to his peers.

He never bought like the great millionaire who accepts the celebrated and duly authenticated at its face value, who follows in the footsteps of the Popes and Princes of past ages. He likes precisely the works that such collections overlook... with him the art-historical passion was stronger than either the social or the purely aesthetic motive of the collector.²⁷¹

Johnson, on numerous occasions, criticized those who might seek paintings by artist names alone. In his 1892 text, he advised would-be American collectors to look beyond old masters, or whatever might be in vogue in the art market to seek out works of quality. In that same passage, he held the Secretan Collection, assembled by French industrialist, Eugene Secretan, as a model.

²⁷⁰ Rudenstine, *The House of*, 86.

²⁷¹ Roger E. Fry, "Mr. John G. Johnson of Philadelphia" *The Burlington Magazine* (May 1917): 203-4.

The Secretan collection was formed upon the correct principle, viz., that of admitting everything good, whether old or new. It demonstrated that art is not of one century only, nor of one country, that the best art is nearly upon the same plane, and that it is possible to hang without jar, side-by-side, works of the masters of the seventeenth and of the nineteenth centuries.²⁷²

Barnes would later put similar ideas into practice, buying from various time periods and displaying artwork in his galleries “without jar, side-by-side.” In fact, both men were known to follow their passions to such a degree that they bought too much of a good thing. Even though in his book Johnson clearly advised the importance of “weeding” out a collection, his eye for quality led him to overbuy.²⁷³ His letters are replete with promises to stop. “I am absolutely crowded out, with about thirty pictures on the floor, after everything has been jammed upon the walls, doors, and chairs.”²⁷⁴ “I am in despair what to do with the recent arrivals. I feel almost as must the man when the Doctor announces Triplets.”²⁷⁵ After a while he makes an effort, “I have just re-hung my pictures, getting rid of everything of which I could possibly make up my mind to divest myself.”²⁷⁶ It is interesting to contrast Johnson here with Frick. Johnson is compelled to stop because he is out of room to display quality paintings. Whereas Frick ceases buying for a different reason, “I do not wish to purchase anything unless it ranks with the

²⁷² Johnson, *Sight-Seeing*, 24.

²⁷³ The term “weed” is common collector parlance but is used specifically by Johnson. Johnson, *Sight-Seeing*, 35.

²⁷⁴ Johnson to Berenson, October 26, 1910, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁷⁵ Johnson to Berenson, October 28, 1910, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁷⁶ Johnson to Berenson, May 16, 1912, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

Rembrandts I have and the Velazquez. So you see my standard is now so high it is not likely I will soon add any pictures to my collection.”²⁷⁷

Despite his insatiable appetite for Renoir and others, Barnes learned to prune his collection. “I am getting so many Van Goghs, Cezannes, Degas, etc. that I am in need of room.”²⁷⁸ This practice is corroborated by the painter John Sloan, “He weeded out the old ones and sold off those he no longer cared for.”²⁷⁹

Shrewd buyers know that in most instances, quality and price are not inextricably bound. Typical collectors were often at the whim of the dealers and auction houses. Johnson and Barnes were not typical collectors. They were eager, but learned to be patient to land a better deal. Johnson recognized his friend Widener’s impatience, which he believed invariably lead to paying higher prices.²⁸⁰ The topic of outrageous prices came up often in Johnson’s letters. “The rage for buying at almost any price, seems on the increase, not the decrease... It seems that the enormous wealth which has been so recently acquired by so many people who have very little intelligent ways of spending the same, is pouring into the purchase of matters of art.”²⁸¹ Johnson frequently mentioned the outsized prices paid by others, “Altman paid \$125,000 for the Ruisdael Wheat Field—a large conception, and fine, but with an overbalance of white light. At \$25,000 he would

²⁷⁷ Frick to Roger Fry, July 31, 1911, Henry Clay Frick Papers, Frick Art Reference Library Archives.

²⁷⁸ Barnes to Johnson, September 30, 1912, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence, Barnes Foundation, Archives

²⁷⁹ John Sloan, *John Sloan*, 25-26.

²⁸⁰ Johnson to Berenson, June 6, 1910, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁸¹ Johnson to Berenson, July 7, 1913, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

have had a high priced work.”²⁸² A year later in 1910, in a description of the auction of the Yerkes Collection, which Johnson attended, he reported to Berenson: “Mr. Frick secured a robust woman, fairly well painted by Frans Hals, worth \$25,000, a price at which it ought to go, at \$137,000 plus 10 per cent to the dealer who obligingly bought it at the auction.”²⁸³

Barnes spent great sums when he had to, but was driven to seek out a bargain. His strategy was to go right to the artist, or to other collectors to avoid the dealers.²⁸⁴ His competitive spirit often brought out the worst in him; he was known to prey upon other collectors who were in financial straits. Many have criticized him for bragging about how little he spent at times.²⁸⁵ “I just robbed everybody, particularly during the depression my specialty was robbing the suckers who had invested their money in flimsy securities and then had to sell their priceless paintings to keep a roof over their heads.”²⁸⁶

At times, he was quick to criticize those who overspent. Meyers recounts one occasion when Barnes publicly attacked the Philadelphia Museum of Art for its purchase

²⁸² Johnson to Berenson, December 29, 1909, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁸³ Johnson to Berenson, April 25, 1910, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. For his reaction see also Walther Liedtke, “Dutch Paintings in America: The Collectors and Their Ideals” in *Great Dutch Paintings from America* ed. Broos, B. P. J., Edwin Buijsen, and Rieke van Leeuwen (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1990), 32.

²⁸⁴ John Rewald, *Cézanne and America*, 276. “It wasn’t so much that Barnes was prepared to pay more than dealers might, but that if advantage could be taken of an owner’s distress, Barnes was the one who wished to do so, and if a bargain could be struck, he wanted to be the one to strike it.”

²⁸⁵ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 22. From the spring of 1912 until the summer of 1913, Barnes corresponded intensively with Alfred Maurer, to whom he paid a retainer, and expressed interest in acquiring more pictures by van Gogh, Degas and Cezanne, In addition to visiting the dealers, Barnes urged Maurer to visit collectors such as Theodore Duret and Dr. Paul Gachet to inquire if they would sell works from their collections.”

²⁸⁶ Quoted in Anderson, *Art Held Hostage*, 3.

of Cezanne's *Large Bathers* for \$110,000. Barnes owned a smaller version of the same subject and complained about the amount of public money spent, claiming he had been advised by a Paris dealer to offer \$50,000 for it.²⁸⁷

Johnson and Barnes both seemed intent on outsmarting the market. Unable to compete with high prices for paintings by highly sought after Old Masters, Johnson shifted to the Italian and Flemish primitives, such as Carlo Crivelli and Robert Campin, long before others caught on. One of his standout purchases was the tiny, 5 x 5 3/4 inches, panel of *St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata*, (Figure 4) which was sold as an Albrecht Durer for \$40, but is today thought to be the first Jan Van Eyck in America.²⁸⁸



Figure 4. Jan van Eyck, *Saint Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata*, 1430-1432, Oil on vellum on panel, 5 x 5 3/4 inches (12.7 x 14.6 cm)
John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

²⁸⁷ Myers, *Art, Education*, 205-207. The painting was actually bought with the Wilstach Fund. Also, see *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 8 1938.

²⁸⁸ Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 103. Esmée Quodbach, "The Last of the American Versailles: The Widener Collection at Lynnewood Hall," *Simiolus* (2002): 76.

British writer, Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith sums up Johnson's approach:

They were bought for less money and with more effort. I can imagine the clever old lawyer, grubbing about in dusty picture shops and playing the long, strange game that goes on between the collector who knows quite as much as the dealer and the dealer who thinks he has not met his match...I wish I knew where he got the tiny Van Eyck, "St Francis receiving the Stigmata," which they've got up in the Parthenon.²⁸⁹

Barnes of course, also shifted his tack in 1912 from overpriced Barbizon paintings to lower-priced works of mainly living artists. And famously he sought out artists like Chaim Soutine, of whom he was the first to collect, purchasing the contents of Soutine's studio, some 60 paintings, in 1923 for \$3,000.²⁹⁰ Soon thereafter, he began collecting art of all media and from all periods.

3) Do Your Homework (and Be Wary of Everyone)

"When he argued with Berenson about the authenticity of a Carlo Crivelli, backing his argument with the memory of a drawing of a forearm by Squarcione or Girolomo da Cremona in the Museum at Padua, sometimes Berenson was right and sometimes he was."²⁹¹ Johnson was capable of engaging with his advisors, and applying knowledge in ways that most collectors could not. In an exchange with Berenson he reveals a remarkable alacrity and facility with visual analysis:

The Dowdeswell pictures have got to me at last. The School of Orcagna, "Deliverance of Peter", is quaint and interesting. The Del Sarto is simply in every way delightful and is in not nearly so bad physical condition as I feared. The hands are most expressive. The black is distinguished. The modeling of the sleeves is charming. The face is full of allurements. Taken

²⁸⁹ Hinks and Royde-Smith, *Pictures and People*, 167.

²⁹⁰ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 68.

²⁹¹ George Biddle, *An American Artist's Story* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), 136.

all in all, it is an exceedingly delightful work, I am very, very glad to have it.²⁹²

He had come of age in a time when the art market was expanding and new publics were forming around the appreciation of art and correspondingly, a great many more books were published on art and there were increasingly more places to view art. As a record of Johnson's quest for knowledge, he left behind a vast library of auction catalogs, art journals, and books. Despite Johnson's reputation as a scholar-collector, and his cautious approach, especially when collecting for the Wilstach Collection, he was bound to make mistakes. In 1903, he wrote to the dealer Spiridon, as if anticipating the Nardus affair, "The discovery of the fact that a painting was a copy, not an original, would inflict mortification which nothing on earth could atone for."²⁹³ When he eventually discovered in 1908 that he had been deceived by "Dutch swindler-dealer" Leo Nardus, and his accomplice Michel van Gelder, he reacted as an attorney might, by appealing to the facts.²⁹⁴ In an attempt to seek redress for his friends, he called on his team of experts to establish an objective position to levy against subjective opinion, seeking truth by consensus.²⁹⁵ He wrote to Van Gelder, "There is not the slightest good in your trying to brazen out the matter by acting and talking as if it was a question about which experts

²⁹² Johnson to Berenson, May 2, 1912, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell's Gallery was a well-known dealer on New Bond Street in London. Johnson made purchases there between 1907-1913.

²⁹³ Johnson to L. de B. Spiridon Esq., September 17, 1903, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁹⁴ Esmée Quodbach, "Collecting Vermeer, 1887–1919," in *Holland's Golden Age in America* ed. by Esmée Quodbach (The Frick Collection; University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 2014), 98.

²⁹⁵ Lopez, "Gross False Pretences," 80. Lopez writes that Johnson believed the opinions of experts were united.

might differ.”²⁹⁶ He would adhere to this strategy through the final decade of his life.

Addressing the whole incident, he wrote to Fry two months later:

The Moderns can be very much better dealt with, as nothing more is required than a stenographer and a continuous dictation. The Ancient pictures require taking down from the walls; removal of glass; and often most minute microscopic examination.²⁹⁷

Johnson’s attitude shifted as a result of this incident. He resolved to publish a catalog to ensure the integrity of his collection. He had not published a catalog since 1892. He wrote to his most trusted advisers, Fry and Berenson, of this new resolve. To Fry, “I do not agree with all the reductions of attribution; but as I intend to publish the catalogue upon the say-so of the particular writer who has done the work. I have left to him absolute *carte blanche*.”²⁹⁸ And to Berenson, “...To have the public hereafter, looking at “geese”, designed as “swans” would turn a gift into a farce. Now, there is certainty that the goose will be called by its proper name.”²⁹⁹

Around this time, Barnes must have heard Johnson discuss this topic. Seeing an experienced hand like Johnson become so frustrated might have given the young collector a reason to exercise caution and rethink his approach. Perhaps it was a matter of taste that led Barnes away from the Old Masters, but it could also be that he was wary of the marketplace, and the work of living artists offered a more direct connection to the creative process and challenged the need for conventional connoisseurs. Regardless of

²⁹⁶ Johnson to Van Gelder, October 15, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁹⁷ Johnson to Fry, December 21, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Johnson to Berenson, November 12, year unknown, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. Berenson worked on the catalog from 1909-1912.

what he chose to focus on, Barnes also had a rigorous work method, “For over three years, I’ve given more time and effort to trying to find out what is a good painting than I’ve ever given to any other subject in my life.”³⁰⁰

Discursive practices

- 1) Engage the public
- 2) Design a deliberate collection
- 3) Take exhibition seriously
- 4) Leave a detailed bequest with a public in mind

Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin in their 2010 study, *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge*, examined: “how individual and collective social actors are able to develop new and culturally innovative forms of public expression, identity, space and action.”³⁰¹ I will follow this approach to highlight actions taken by Johnson and Barnes, individually and in some sense in concert, which effectively pushed new forms of public discourse by way of writing, collecting, exhibiting, and founding legacy institutions.

1) Engage the Public

In 1867, as a young man of twenty-six, four years after being admitted to the bar, John G. Johnson took it upon himself to publish a sixty-one-page pamphlet defending the honor of the late Dr. Benjamin Rush. The argument itself is not of particular interest here, however, it is significant that at such an early age, he understood the importance of

³⁰⁰ Barnes to Johnson, January 21, 1915, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

³⁰¹ Wilson and Yachnin, *Making Publics*, 3.

directly addressing the public as a pathway to affecting change.³⁰² As a collector, he courted the public at a surprisingly early date after less than a decade; in 1885, he lent 41 paintings to an exhibition at the Union League of Philadelphia.³⁰³ An art exhibition is a form of public discourse; it presents a selection of art in a particular arrangement with the express intention of inviting a reaction from a viewing public. Johnson continued to lend his paintings to exhibitions throughout his life, but he never stopped complaining about it. For example, just two years prior to the Union League Exhibition, he declined to lend a painting to Harrison Morris, the Director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, as doing so “would leave a great black at the head of stairs where it is hung.”³⁰⁴ In 1909, he reported to Edward Robinson, on an outstanding request to display his paintings, “As to any of my own pictures, I told him I was averse beyond expression to allow anything to leave the house. There is always some trouble resulting therefrom.”³⁰⁵ However, later that same year, Johnson lent a number of paintings to the Metropolitan Museum of art as part of the Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909.³⁰⁶

One has to wonder if Johnson’s rhetoric had made its way into Barnes’ ear, such that he declined to share any of his paintings for display at the Armory Show, despite the

³⁰² Hampton L. Carson, John G. Johnson, Esq. An Address Delivered at the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting, Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania, June 27, 1917 (1917): 4.

³⁰³ Strehlke, *Italian Paintings*, 1.

³⁰⁴ Johnson to Harrison Morris, May 10, 1883, Cataloged Correspondence, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Dorothy and Kenneth Woodcock Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

³⁰⁵ Johnson to Edward Robinson, May 10, 1909, John G. Johnson correspondence, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York..

³⁰⁶ Metropolitan Museum of Art, Florence N. Levy, Henry Watson Kent, and Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner, *The Hudson-Fulton Celebration: Catalogue of an Exhibition Held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Commemorative of the Tercentenary of the Discovery of the Hudson River by Henry Hudson in the Year 1609, and the Centenary of the First Use of Steam in the Navigation of Said River by Robert Fulton in the Year 1807 ...* (New York, September to November, MCMIX. 1909).

fact that one of the key organizers was Arthur Davies, who was part of his then current contact network, including Maurer and Glackens. According to Meyers, Barnes had claimed that his paintings were part of his everyday and he could not part with them.³⁰⁷ In December of 1922, Barnes allowed his new dealer Paul Guillaume to exhibit 50 of his recently purchased works of African sculpture and Modern paintings, including works by Manet, Van Gogh, Renoir, Redon, Derain, Utrillo, Pascin and others.³⁰⁸ Fresh off this success, he lent 75 of his paintings to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in the spring of 1923, for an exhibition in Exhibition of Contemporary European Painting and Sculpture. According to curator Robert Cozzolino, “allowing a public exhibition of his collection was in concert with his emerging democratic philosophy of experiential arts education.”³⁰⁹ Based on an article published in the *New Republic* a month before the exhibition, Barnes was clearly hopeful that Philadelphia would embrace his view of Modern art and his new educational initiative.³¹⁰ He wrote the introduction to the catalog, in which he seemed to brace for the harsh criticism that he feared was awaiting his beloved paintings: “If one will accord to these artists the simple justice of educated and unbiased attention, one will see the truth of what experienced students of painting all assert: that old art and new art are the same in fundamental principles.”³¹¹ Things did not go well. Critics harshly criticized paintings by Soutine and others as grotesque and debased. In his vitriolic responses to the critics, Barnes set off a decades-long war with

³⁰⁷ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 34.

³⁰⁸ Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist*, 131.

³⁰⁹ Robert Cozzolino, “PAFA and Dr. Barnes,” 24.

³¹⁰ Albert C. Barnes, “The Barnes Foundation,” *New Republic* (March 14, 1923): 65-67.

³¹¹ Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Contemporary European Paintings and Sculpture: April 11, 1923 - May 9, 1923, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: The Academy, 1923), 7.

the press and the Philadelphia establishment. He would be more cautious about lending works of art going forward, and did not lend again for a decade.³¹²

Johnson and Barnes courted the public through the printed word. This is not without parallel with art collectors, Duncan Phillips published on a par with Barnes by way of many articles and books, but it is rare. Johnson published a single work of art criticism with his travel book from 1892. Barnes began with an introduction to a show by Alfred Maurer in 1912, and followed that with two articles in *Arts and Decoration*.³¹³ From there he contributed works to newspapers and handful of articles, but once the Foundation was established, he published exclusively under the mark of his own Foundation. This includes the book that provides the most insight into his methodology, *The Art in Painting* (1925).

Johnson cataloged his collection twice. The first catalog from 1892 featured 292 paintings. Then second instance involved a two-catalog set of Italian paintings by Berenson in 1913, and of Flemish and Dutch paintings by Valentiner in 1914, between them featuring 1,180 works.³¹⁴ Barnes did not publish a catalog in his lifetime. He refused to allow photographs of his paintings.³¹⁵ While his Indenture of Trust did not explicitly restrict photography, it did forbid copies of any kind. In the McCardle article in

³¹² Sidney Fiske Kimball, Writings and Research, Fiske Kimball Correspondence 1923-1926, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. For the inaugural exhibition of the new museum building in 1928, Fiske Kimball wrote to request loans from Barnes. According to Fiske Kimball, “N.E. Mullen responded saying that my letter would make a horse laugh.” This was the tenor of the typical response for loans going forward. According to the Barnes Archives, recent archival research shows he lent works Barnes loaned to the Whitney, Reading Museum, Bignou Gallery, and to Chas Laughton in the 1930s and 40s.

³¹³ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 130.

³¹⁴ Strehlke, *Italian Paintings*, 1.

³¹⁵ Rewald, *Cézanne and America*, 276.

The Saturday Evening Post, Barnes offered this rationale, “And don’t let anybody tell you that a colored reproduction by even the best specialist has any real relation to what the painting contains; its analogue is a hearsay version of a honeymoon narrated by an octogenarian.”³¹⁶

Unlike Johnson, Barnes did not confine his opinions to print, he was known to attend public lectures and create an incident. McCardle recounts Barnes and his students publicly haranguing art historian Thomas Craven with questions at a public lecture at Temple University to highlight the limits of traditional art history.”³¹⁷

2) Design a deliberate collection

In his famous essay, “Unpacking My Library,” Walter Benjamin wrote, “The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them.”³¹⁸ Johnson and Barnes were not immune to the thrill of the chase, and were often as earnest as any other to add certain objects to their collections, but in the aggregate, they collected purposefully, designing deliberate collections. Even when Johnson was after a painting by a particular artist, it was in the service of a larger goal. American artist, George Biddle, recalled an exchange he had with Johnson:

Biddle, he drawled in his slow, Philadelphian, nasal twang, I venture to hope that someday my collection will have some breadth of educational purpose. You can pick up a Holbein anywhere. He’s on the market. But I

³¹⁶ McCardle, “The Terrible-Tempered,” 68.

³¹⁷ McCardle, “The Terrible-Tempered,” 66. “Barnes professed to be unsatisfied with Craven’s answers. Getting to his feet, he pointed a finger at the lecturer and said, Craven, you know you’re tin-canning.”

³¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 60.

wanted a Correggio. There was no Correggio in America. So I swapped in the Holbein and now I have my Antonio Allegri.³¹⁹

Johnson knew what he wanted and had the wherewithal to seek it out. While he did not explicitly state his goal in print, others have recognized his mission to build a representative collection of European painting that would be useful for educational purposes. Art historian Peter Sutton extended this goal to claim that Johnson aimed to “serve society.”³²⁰ Roger Fry, wrote of the contribution of the “useful collector,” perhaps with him in mind:

Those who collect what is already valued highly add nothing to the spiritual wealth of the world. The really useful collector is what we might call the creative collector, the collector who by merely bringing objects together, classifying them, interpreting their interrelations creates new values altogether.³²¹

An additional angle to view Johnson’s approach is by way of his collecting for the Wilstach Fund, as a member of the Fairmount Park Commission, and his advising as member of the Board at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His ability to separate his own goals from those of the other institutions is interesting, yet according to art historian Anne Higonnet, not without precedent. Writing about collection museums, she points out that the same people were often involved in both, “whether casually or in a major

³¹⁹ Biddle, *An American Artist's*, 136.

³²⁰ Peter C. Sutton, “Recent Patterns of Public and Private Collecting of Dutch Art,” in *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, eds. Broos, B. P. J., Edwin Buijsen, and Rieke van Leeuwen (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1990), 426. Also see Walther Liedtke, “Dutch Paintings in America: The Collectors and Their Ideals,” in *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, eds. Broos, B. P. J., Edwin Buijsen, and Rieke van Leeuwen (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1990), 426. Carl Brandon Strehlke, *Italian Paintings*, 7.

³²¹ Roger Fry, “Reflections on Germany and its Art Collections” (unpublished manuscript, May 1928-June 1928). The Papers of Roger Eliot Fry, King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge University.

advisory capacity.”³²² While not writing about Johnson, Higonet suggests that collectors who left behind individual collection museums, while they might recognize some value in the encyclopedic museum model, for myriad reasons, consciously rejected it. Anne d’Harnoncourt, and Joe Rishel, longtime director and curator at Philadelphia Museum of Art, confirm that Johnson was “a strong advocate for art museums, and a believer in their role in the creation of an educated and well-rounded society.”³²³

Since he was constantly in court, attending to legal matters in Philadelphia, Johnson could not make monthly meetings of the Met’s Board and instead sent dozens of letters to then President, Robert de Forest. Bringing his knowledge of the market to bear he offered advice, such as: “I do not think well of purchasing any object, whatever may be its historical interest, which does not recommend itself by its own merit. There are a great many paintings and other art objects quite as meritorious as, often more meritorious than, those which are popular.”³²⁴ It is worth digressing here to consider a work that Johnson chose for his own collection, which might fit this category. A typical example of a painting that was, “too good a wine to need a label,” is *Portrait of a Nobleman with Dueling Gauntlet*, (Figure 5) on display as part of the Johnson Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which despite being unattributed to a specific artist, stands as an outstanding and accomplished example of late Italian Renaissance portraiture.³²⁵ The painting commands the viewer’s attention as the full-length unidentified man stares

³²² Higonet, *A Museum*, 9.

³²³ Anne d’Harnoncourt and Joseph Rishel, “Foreword” in Strehlke, *Italian Paintings*, vii.

³²⁴ Johnson to R. W. deForest, October 14, 1910, John G. Johnson correspondence, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York..

³²⁵ Quoted in Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 101.

out confidently displaying the finely detailed accouterment of an armored nobleman in sixteenth century Italy.



Figure 5. *Portrait of a Nobleman with Dueling Gauntlet*, Artist/maker unknown, Possibly made in Emilia, Italy, Europe, 1562, oil on canvas, 6' 5" x 3' 7"
John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

After Glackens returned in 1912, Barnes set off on his own on two separate trips and returned with more paintings by Van Gogh, Degas, Cézanne, and Picasso.³²⁶ He rapidly developed a sense of quality, and sparked by Fry's Post Impressionist exhibition, focused his attention on the artists featured there, including Picasso who was not included in the first show at Grafton Galleries. As a variation on Johnson's advice to avoid collecting famous names, Barnes would often acquire less well-known paintings by famous artists, sometimes in great multiples, as with Renoir, to offer a deeper

³²⁶ Wattenmaker, *American Paintings*, 22.

understanding of the artist's overall approach. A famous exchange with Duncan Phillips points to Barnes' strategy; when asked why he only had the one Renoir, Phillips reportedly replied, "It's the only one I need."³²⁷ When he took an interest in an area of collecting he tended to jump in full force. An example is his rapid acquisition of African sculpture. Once he committed to the idea that African Art could dialogue with works by Western artists, such as Picasso and Modigliani, already in his collection, he purchased more than 100 objects between 1922 and 1924.³²⁸ Barnes did not buy indiscriminately. He shaped a collection that would help him to achieve his educational goals. He apparently bragged to McCardle that his collection was complete, but there were nine pictures in private ownership in the world he would like to add and had standing orders with dealers for these at any price, whenever their owners decide to sell them.³²⁹

3) Take exhibition seriously

Johnson had specific ideas about display.³³⁰ In his will, from 1912, he laid out in detail the features of the museum he advised the city to build and that would hold his collection, an edifice like the new Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin with its low-ceilinged side galleries, a museum full of natural light emitted from windows to the side and from above.³³¹ Johnson admired the approach taken by then-director, and one of his

³²⁷ Braddock, *Collecting As Modernist*, 108.

³²⁸ Clarke and Bourgeois, *African Art*, 7.

³²⁹ McCardle, "The Terrible-Tempered," 20.

³³⁰ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 164.

³³¹ Will of John G. Johnson, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. See also, Lloyd DeWitt, "They Leave Us," 111.

advisors on German Art, Wilhelm von Bode's arrangement of the galleries.³³² In the final years of his life, he grew concerned that the plans to build a museum on Fairmount might not come to pass and he began discussing alternate plans with friends. George Norris claimed Johnson detailed his ideas before his death:

I utterly disapprove of the exhibition of pictures in larger and ornamental galleries. Every dollar spent on the architectural or sculptural adornment of a gallery distracts the attention of the visitor from the pictures. Paintings should be shown in a comparatively small and perfectly plain brick building.³³³

As will be discussed in Chapter Five, in 1915, he took steps by purchasing a larger home next door on Broad Street to house his paintings. He may have been inspired by the plans of Frick, who intended to make his home a museum. In letters to Berenson, Johnson frequently showed interest in Frick's plans and confirmed knowledge of them in 1916, "He has been making immense sums of money and he feels that his best chance to be remembered will be through the collection which he will leave to the public."³³⁴ In a codicil to his will, Johnson stipulated that his collection was to be displayed as a totality in his home and only moved if the site became unsafe for the paintings.

In Johnson lore, guests frequently commented on the topic of his overstuffed home, with paintings displayed pell-mell on the foot of the bed and in the bathroom. Mary Berenson wrote in a letter to Isabella Stewart Gardner, "The perfectly awful thing is the way his pictures are placed—all over the walls and doors, on easels and morning

³³² DeWitt, "They Leave Us," 86.

³³³ Geo. W. Norris, "The Johnson Art Collection: An Open Letter to the Mayor and City Council," April 24, 1922. John G. Johnson correspondence, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

³³⁴ Johnson to Berenson, May 12, 1916, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

stands. You can hardly move about.”³³⁵ However, in the end they point not to a lack of care, but mostly to a problem of volume that Johnson frequently acknowledged. “The floor is still pretty badly littered up; but some of the finest things, by way of substitution, have at last good places—as good as possible in my crowded, badly lighted, house.”³³⁶ In terms of display, Johnson would invite guests to his home each Sunday and focus discussion by prominently featuring selected pictures. Of these visits Fry noted, “A weekend with him at Philadelphia was a strenuous exercise, for his energy and enthusiasm were inexhaustible.”³³⁷ His biographer Winkelman corroborates this, “He stood off and looked at them, climbed a stepladder for a closer view, turned lights off and on for color effects. They were volumes of infinite perusal, and he wanted them close at hand for constant study.”³³⁸

We can witness the care by which Johnson valued the viewer’s experience of art. In his book, he had addressed the challenge of viewing work in a small museum in The Hague that was tainted by the need to walk through the galleries with a “loud-voiced butler, expecting reward for uninteresting gabble.”³³⁹ Of another collection in Rotterdam belonging to Fop Smit, he reveals his concern with proper placement of paintings and with the suitability of a work in relation to the wider collection.

³³⁵ Bernard Berenson, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Mary Berenson, and Rollin van N. Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1887-1924, with Correspondence by Mary Berenson* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 330.

³³⁶ Johnson to Berenson, May 16, 1912, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

³³⁷ Roger E. Fry, “Mr. John G. Johnson of Philadelphia,” *The Burlington Magazine* (May 1917): 203-4. Also see: *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, XV 13 (December 23, 1914): 476. “It was a matter of no perfunctory visitation, but a memorable all-day affair.”

³³⁸ Winkelman, *John G. Johnson*, 166.

³³⁹ Johnson, *Sight-Seeing*, 34.

It fills two large, well-lighted galleries, and several of the living rooms of his beautiful house. It resembles most of our American collections in that it is unweeded and is full of incongruities. Canvases from the Spaniards, loud in color, destitute of tone and quality, jostle some of the finest examples of the Frenchmen. The collection shows a lack of discrimination in the selection of artists to be represented and works illustrating them. It would be much more valuable artistically, probably financially, if it contained fewer paintings.³⁴⁰

His willingness to fuss over display is revealed in a series of letters to the gallery director of the Wilstach Collection. He would often direct the arrangement of pictures.

I think it would perhaps be best for you to hang the Raffaelli where we suggested in order that the eye may not be caught by so light a picture in looking from our main room into the one in which it will be located. I think upon the whole it would be best despite some disadvantages to put the Whistler on the North Wall.³⁴¹

Barnes was precise in matters of exhibition. His stated goal was to use his collection to study art, not merely be entertained by it. In alignment with Johnson, he would reject anything that might distract the attention of the visitor from the pictures. To that end, he eschewed the more traditional museum taxonomy, actively rethinking the exhibition of paintings. Barnes innovated what he called “ensembles,” which arranged works of art not according to traditional categories of style, chronology or region, but on formal properties and principles of design.³⁴² As Judith Dolkart, has pointed out, “The

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 36.

³⁴¹ Johnson to Miss Shrank, Custodian, The Wilstach Collection of Paintings, Memorial Hall, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 28, 1896, Wilstach Collection Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

³⁴² Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Abrams, 1994); Ian Dunlop, *The Shock of the New: Seven Historic Exhibitions of Modern Art* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972); Wilson, *The Modern Eye*.

collector's cabinet, the English country home, and the French Salon seemingly provide visual precedents for the cheek-by-jowl installations at the Foundation.³⁴³ Likewise, Barnes was familiar with the approach of Alfred Stieglitz, arranging works on criteria, such as palette, composition, size and shape³⁴⁴.

The Foundation has a charter as an educational institution and it intends to live up to its stated purposes. It provides for all classes of people who show sufficient interest to enroll in and attend the classes organized for systematic study. If you have any persons who meet that description, we can take care of them. But for casual visitors, whatever their alleged qualifications or under whatever local prestige style may be proposed, there is absolutely nothing done. I am writing you frankly so that we shall be spared the nuisance of further phone calls, pleadings, and arguments.³⁴⁵

So wrote Barnes to Sidney Fiske Kimball, the newly appointed Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, who had inquired about bringing visitors to see the Collection. The letter confidently restates the foundation's mission offering "systematic study" for "all classes of people." As the Foundation opened in 1925, Barnes was eager to advocate for his new project in all his correspondence and even contributed articles in popular magazines, such as *Arts and Decoration* and *The New Republic*, even if he had not yet worked out the details of how he was to put his concept into practice.

Both men pushed back against accepted practice. Johnson insisted on displaying the paintings, not in a museum or institutional gallery, but in his home, rejecting the need for large and ornamental gallery spaces. Barnes pioneered an entirely new all-encompassing format for viewers to experience art. These men, as part of a culture of collecting in Philadelphia, were reacting to existing traditional exhibitional approaches familiar at the Pennsylvania Museum at Memorial Hall and the Pennsylvania Academy of

³⁴³ Dolkart, *The Barnes Foundation*, 24.

³⁴⁴ Wilson, *The Modern Eye*, 47.

³⁴⁵ Barnes to Fiske Kimball, October 27, 1926, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Fine Arts. Even the Wannamaker store opened a commercial art gallery in his flagship store at 13th and Market streets in downtown Philadelphia in 1878. However, Johnson and Barnes were founding collection museums. By way of the agency of the collector, these spaces reorient discourse on art towards matters of display, cohesiveness, orientation, relevance to art historical style, individual taste, etc. To borrow language from art historian Jennifer Barrett, in her book *Museums and the Public Sphere* (2012), “the culture of display was changing.”³⁴⁶

4) Leave a Detailed Bequest with a public in mind

Unlike collectors Helen Frick or Joseph Widener, neither Johnson, nor Barnes had an heir to champion their art after death. Likewise, neither had a Lady Wallace to establish a collection museum after their death. Johnson’s wife had predeceased him, and while Barnes’ wife Laura outlived him, she was entirely focused on the arboretum at the Foundation. In full knowledge that many single collections did not outlive their founder, like that of John Quinn, or Charles Tyson Yerkes, it was incumbent upon them to set affairs in order to ensure a proper legacy. Each man lived with art in an exceptional way. Works of art were not merely things they owned, to be dispersed with their respective estates; they were their life’s work. What made their respective bequests unique, (in Barnes case it was the Indenture of Trust for the Foundation) at least in the art world, was some sense of a public for their art.

As was noted earlier in this chapter, Johnson had always intended to leave his collection to the city museum, but had changed his will in the final years of his life to

³⁴⁶ Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 54.

indicate the citizens of Philadelphia as his beneficiaries. “The leisure moments of my life have been spent in making this collection. My hope has always been that it will be accepted by the City of Philadelphia, upon the not onerous conditions I will impose. I have lived my life in this City. I want the collection to have its home here.”³⁴⁷ The specifics of the bequest and how it was received will be explored in Chapter Five. Here it is sufficient to understand how Johnson’s attempt to deliver his paintings directly to a selected public became a model for Barnes.

In June of 1912, Barnes wrote to Johnson to change his will from a bequest to the University of Pennsylvania to “be given to the city in a way that the best use would be made of them.”³⁴⁸ By 1915, Barnes he had written to Durand-Ruel of his intention one day to donate his collection to the city of Philadelphia.³⁴⁹ It was around this time when Johnson added the codicil to his will redirecting his collection away from the hands of City officials. And as John Anderson suggests, “Johnson had, in effect, laid out the blueprint for what Barnes went on to do...”³⁵⁰

Their respective detailed bequests should be considered examples of discourse. The collections become texts, which are received and analyzed by the target audience—the working people of Philadelphia—and through this process continue to evolve through repeated readings. However, in both cases, this ideal arrangement fell prey to the interests of new publics that challenged the agency of the individual collector to shape his legacy. The complexity surrounding the reception of their bequests is explored in Chapter Five.

³⁴⁷ Will of John G. Johnson, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

³⁴⁸ Barnes to John G. Jonson, June 22, 1912, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

³⁴⁹ Rewald, *Cézanne and America*, 268.

³⁵⁰ Anderson, *Art Held Hostage*, 22.

CHAPTER 5 ART COLLECTORS AND THEIR PUBLICS: JOHNSON AND BARNES

The individual bequests and resulting legacy institutions of Johnson and Barnes serve as rich case studies to assess the efforts of collectors to control the reception of their respective collections by the public. These particular histories, exceptional in their own ways, are juxtaposed to offer a view onto previously understudied challenges to the status quo, mounted by a few collectors by way of unique discursive practices and the establishment of distinctive single collection institutions in the formative period for American art museums around the turn of the twentieth century in Philadelphia. The focus is on the two men's often shared, but eventually divergent, ideas pertaining to art and the public, which can be tracked to relevant discourses that informed those views. At stake in this investigation is the relative tension between the agency of the collectors and the repurposing of their individual collections by future publics. More plainly, the goal is to study the interrelated narratives of collectors, Johnson and Barnes. Their stories unfolded over the course of the long twentieth century with an eye to what is gained or lost from the unraveling of the deliberate plans left by the collectors, which in both of these cases, included relocating the art work from the original site, leading to coincident shifts in the manner of display and targeted audience. It is not the point of this study to weigh in on matters of justice regarding the individual cases; rather the goal is to probe the limits of an art collector's vision held against the dynamic needs of publics, and evaluate what this might mean for the twenty-first century.

To begin, it will be useful to provide historical context related to the founding of American museums and the increasing interest in viewing art in the time period under

consideration. This will provide a view onto the existing art public around the turn of the century when Johnson was beginning to plan his bequest, and Barnes was near to follow. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in large American cities alone, fourteen public art museums—meaning those that were government sponsored, with no restrictions on who can attend—were established from Indianapolis to Portland, Oregon, between 1870-1901.³⁵¹ Stakeholders, comprised of civic leaders, politicians, collectors and others, borrowed from existing models in Europe, and ultimately patched together museums from known and related practices. The Philadelphia Museum of Art is a fine example of the arc of this trend. It was founded in 1876, as the Pennsylvania Museum (I will use this term to distinguish the early developmental phase before it became the Philadelphia Museum of Art), and housed at Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park, but did not open in its current location until March of 1928. By that time, an eager public of over one million visitors attended in the first year.³⁵² The Pennsylvania Museum, along with others across the country, was modeled on the art exhibition staged for the 1876 Centennial International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine. There are no attendance statistics specifically for the art pavilion, but the broader event drew ten million visitors over a six-month period. While a world's fair-type-public had been

³⁵¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art 1870, Museum of Fine Arts Boston 1870, Chicago Institute of Fine Arts 1879, Philadelphia Museum of Art 1876, Saint Louis Art Museum 1881, Milwaukee Art Museum 1882, Minneapolis Institute of Art 1883, Detroit Institute of Arts 1885, Indianapolis Museum of Art 1885, Portland Museum of Art 1892, Brooklyn Museum of Art 1895, Carnegie Museum of Art 1896, Houston Museum of Fine Arts 1900, Toledo Museum of Art 1901.

³⁵² By comparison, the Philadelphia Museum of art recorded 670,000 visitors in 2016. The Johnson Collection house museum peaked at 11,000 or so visitors in its best year before being transferred to the Philadelphia Museum in 1933. Due to the fact that the Barnes was not opened to the public at that time, there are no admission statistics, but since the move, the Barnes recorded 240,000 visitors in 2015.

groomed for decades in Europe and America, beginning with the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851, the event marked the blossoming of a relatively smaller art-viewing public in Philadelphia (and elsewhere). At the same time, it inspired wealthy individuals to begin buying art, and sparked a culture of collecting in Philadelphia, which would include Johnson and Barnes.

A complicating factor for how arts institutions nestled in this new democracy was that America was not a land of inherited titles and wealth, or a place where art collections remained in families as a matter of tradition; therefore, aristocratic institutions, such as the Louvre or the Prado, were a poor analog. Moreover, the profoundly new idea that art, as presented in a public museum, had some usefulness beyond recreational or privileged viewing emerged most prominently with the establishment of the South Kensington Museum, later to be the Victoria and Albert Museum. The mission was focused on applied arts, in the hope of improving the quality of manufactured goods by inspiring workers, especially artisans, in the principles of good design. According to historian Steven Conn, the museum at South Kensington centered on an object-based epistemology, without providing any accompanying context beyond the works of art themselves, as if the objects did not need further explanation, even to “untrained observers.”³⁵³ He indicated that the Pennsylvania Museum of Art was founded on this model, and while American museums would slowly move away from the practical application of the arts, by the 1920s they still claimed “The need of the general public for an art museum is as great as that of the special students. If our textiles and our furniture and our architecture are to improve, it is only through the educated demand of the

³⁵³ Conn, *Museums and American*, 4.

public.”³⁵⁴ They would continue to present objects without any supplementary educational materials, e.g. docents or wall text for decades. According to art historian, Mary Anne Staniszewski, wall text, or didactic labels, did not become common practice until the 1930s.³⁵⁵ The newly opened Philadelphia Museum of Art, under the command of curator Sidney Fiske Kimball from 1925-1955, did attempt to engage “ordinary visitors” by installing a series of period rooms in the 1930s, and included nameplates next to objects. It did not, however, pursue substantive educational outreach to the public until the era of the New Museology in the 1970s, when museums worldwide began to take measures to address charges of elitism, and renewed focus on the experience of the visitor.³⁵⁶

The increase in the number of museums in the late nineteenth century was accompanied by a shift in traditional epistemological foundations. According to Philosopher David Carrier:

The birth of the public art museum was intimately bound up with the rise of academic art history, new aesthetic theories, and the development of democracy. Once high art moved from churches, temples, and princely collections into the public space of the museum, visitors needed to be educated.³⁵⁷

Carrier cites the importance of an expanding discourse surrounding fine art. This included an increase in the number of scholars writing about art history and a surge in the

³⁵⁴ *New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: publisher not identified, 1922), 7; 20. John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

³⁵⁵ Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998), 78. First used by Alfred Barr in the Van Gogh show in 1935.

³⁵⁶ Conn, *Museums and American*, 226. For New Museology see, Barrett, *Museums*, 3-7, and Peter Vergo, *New Museology* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

³⁵⁷ Carrier, *Museum Skepticism*, 11.

publishing industry, which afforded new access to knowledge of the fine arts by way of books, journals, and catalogs in circulation.³⁵⁸ More compelling still is the idea that the perceived need for art education stemmed from the movement away from well-established sources of patronage for the arts, namely the aristocratic state and the church, which had provided context for their reception. In Europe, this shift had unfolded most visibly in the founding of the Louvre in Paris, opened to the public in 1793. This amounted to a symbolic transfer of property from the private to the public sphere.

Similarly, in America, it would take nearly a century after the founding of the first American art museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art established in 1870, for the shift to a public educational model to become more practice than rhetoric. While there were offerings in fine art instruction from the beginning, there were no formal programs until late in the 20th century. Today the idea that an art museum's primary function is to educate is at a near consensus. Current mission statements of art museums in the United States employ consistent rhetoric in their aim to reach out to the general public. For example, the Metropolitan Museum is intent on "furnishing popular instruction," while the Philadelphia Museum of Art aspires to "extend the reach of its great collections in particular, and the visual arts in general, to an increasing and increasingly diverse audience as a source of delight, illumination and lifelong learning." As expected, each institution currently has extensive educational programs by way of gallery signage and labeling, education courses, public tours, interactive websites, digital content, and academic lectures.

³⁵⁸ The first American PhD in art history was awarded at Harvard in 1913.

The demand for art museums and the coterminous increase in the number of Americans collecting and subsequently donating art in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, is often explained by way of the social shift that accompanied the ascendancy of American industrial power and big business in the wake of Reconstruction, and the corresponding outsized wealth it created for a relatively small number of individuals. Historian Sven Beckert, in his study of this period, asserted that these American elites, who were the first group not to derive status from “birth or heritage,” were not merely seeking prestige by supporting cultural institutions, but were in a struggle over the public sphere.³⁵⁹ This new wealthy class was intent on gaining access to old world institutions, and when none was granted, worked to establish new ones that would uphold their goals as new world benefactors, by extending access to the arts for the general public.³⁶⁰ However, Beckert criticized wealthy bankers and manufacturers as “stewards of the community,” for using their money and influence to elevate cultural opportunities for working class people—their employees—primarily out of economic self-interest. Art historian, John Ott, was equally skeptical about the motives of wealthy donors, as he charged that collectors mastered the well-rehearsed rhetoric of “collecting for the public” out of a desire to bolster their “bourgeois identity.”³⁶¹ In line with the concerns of Beckert and Ott, regarding the self-interest of collectors, and the museums they supported,

³⁵⁹ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 48. “In the hurly-burly atmosphere of New York, the merchants and bankers were, often to their great displeasure, jostled and circumvented in controlling the central institutions of the public sphere, such as museums, orchestras, theaters, and even opera houses...”

³⁶⁰ Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 247. Recounts how Vanderbilt was denied a box at the Academy of Music, so he and others, Gould, Vanderbilt, Morgan, Whitney, Baker and Rockefeller all contributed \$10,000 each to incorporate the Metropolitan Opera in 1880, the Academy was out of business by 1885.

³⁶¹ Ott, *Manufacturing the Modern*, 13.

sociologist, Tony Bennett, in his influential work *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), famously stated that newly formed museums in America in the late nineteenth-century might have been “intended for the people, but were not of the people.”³⁶² To this end, the museum as a public institution reinforced existing social relations, and the working class was granted access, but relegated to the role of passive spectators in this nascent world of high culture.

John Ruskin was an early proponent for this line of thinking in the nineteenth century, of using museum spaces to civilize the workforce. He wrote in favor of bringing art within the reach of working people, but he was a complicated figure who leaned on Christian morality.³⁶³ His ideas on the benefits of arts education for the working class as a path to cultural and moral enrichment became popular in America in the 1850s, but as art historian, Roger B. Stein has indicated, by the 1880s, when Johnson and others began collecting, Americans did not necessarily have to read Ruskin to receive his wisdom. There were dedicated followers from the previous generation, who themselves, already gleaned what was useful for their own purposes.³⁶⁴ Two such men who proved influential for art collectors were Charles Elliot Norton, who taught the first art history course at Harvard University in 1874, where he mentored Bernard Berenson, and American art critic James Jackson Jarves, who wrote over a dozen books on art and aesthetics and

³⁶² Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 109, 135. For a more recent discussion of museums and the public sphere see, Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 47-49.

³⁶³ Keith Hanley and Brian Maidment, *Persistent Ruskin: Studies in Influence, Assimilation and Effect* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Burlington, VT, 2013), 11. Rudenstine, *The House*, 70. “Ruskin’s friend, minister Samuel Barnet, preached in museums.”

³⁶⁴ Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840-1900* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 155.

advised wealthy patrons on matters of art in popular journals, such as *The Art Journal* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. These men shared Ruskin's drive to bring art to the people, but with differing approaches. Norton was focused on cultivating taste and instilling a sense of how the beauty in art could be studied apart from moral values. He was a collector and encouraged his students to donate art for the public to study. Jarves held a more cynical position aimed at maintaining power for the new class of economic elites, viewing art as part of a strategy to placate industrial workers.³⁶⁵ As will be addressed in this chapter, Johnson and Barnes owned books by Ruskin, and Johnson owned a few by Jarves, but in the end, they engaged with Ruskin's ideas by way of Berenson and Fry.

Not long after it opened, the Philadelphia Museum of Art emerged as the locus of art exhibition in Philadelphia in the twentieth century.³⁶⁶ This was the culmination of decades of collecting by "public-spirited citizens," including John H. Mcfadden, William L. Elkins, George W. Elkins, and William P. and Anna H. Wiltstach. Despite their shared working class backgrounds, all rose to what I will call the American noblesse oblige model of collecting, more closely aligned with Jarves' position, using their wealth to donate paintings for the benefit of the public, but not worrying after how those works will be viewed or by whom.³⁶⁷ The challenge of this chapter will be to make a special case for

³⁶⁵ Ott, *Manufacturing*, 31. Jarves' end goal was less social welfare than social order – "the only permanent security for a republic," he argued in 1863, "is the enlarged culture of its citizens." Ott quotes Jarves as advising collectors "museums cost society less than prisons." See also Barrett, *Museums*, chapter three for a discussion of art museums and the working class.

³⁶⁶ The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archeology (1887) and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (1805) also exhibited art, but were more traditional study and research collections that primarily served the needs of their students.

³⁶⁷ Pennsylvania Museum of Art, *General Guide to the Collections of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art in Memorial Hall, Fairmont Park, Philadelphia, Pa.* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Museum, 1915), 7. This is not an exhaustive list, but

the efforts of Johnson and Barnes, as they pushed against the then dominant model in America. They were part of a narrower set that were out to establish single collection museums, and were an even narrower pair amongst those few.³⁶⁸ However, establishing a collection museum is not criteria enough to separate a collector from the broader trend. For example, Henry Clay Frick stands as a prominent example of an individual who designed a collection museum during his lifetime, but closely conformed to the American noblesse oblige paradigm critiqued by Ott. Frick displayed no interest in education or the needs of the public. Johnson and Barnes, in their own way, actively presented alternative public spaces outside of the larger museum to display works of art with a specific public in mind.

It would not be wise to oversell Johnson and Barnes' lack of interest in the trappings of success. While they both expressed displeasure with Philadelphia high society, they, not unlike Widener and the others, viewed buying art as an aspect of living well, along with private Pullman cars, transcontinental vacations, and spectacular mansions. However, while others were content with this level of distraction, Johnson and Barnes sought greater significance through art collecting. They neither saw art as an extension of wealth or a means of social control. They leveraged their collections to engage the public, by way of the series of discursive practices enumerated in the previous chapter, in particular, leaving a detailed bequest with a public in mind, publishing on art, and seeking out new modes of display, in contrast to the more passive approach of the American noblesse oblige model that donated the art and left it up to the larger institution

highlights the fact that large public collections depended on donations from collectors, yet these origins are often obscured in the service of the unity of the city collection.³⁶⁸ Higonnet, *A Museum*, 5. Higonnet, who coined the term, claims, "The larger museums were the action and the smaller the reaction."

to define the public. By offering alternatives to social structures already in place, as at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, they were “public making” in the sense articulated by art historian Bronwen Wilson, and Shakespeare scholar Paul Yachnin in their *Making Publics* project centered at McGill University between 2005-2010.³⁶⁹ Beyond merely accumulating cultural treasures to be displayed to an undetermined public, Johnson and Barnes created new associations for the objects. Johnson insisted on an art historical approach, offering a view onto the major schools of European painting from the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century. The difference of approach inside the galleries is subtle compared to how paintings were hung at Memorial Hall, but is significant in terms of how Johnson presents the viewer not with masterpieces by well-known artists, but with works of quality that invite a response. Similarly, for Barnes, it involved creating wall ensembles to challenge viewers to see modern art, not in an isolated manner as an assemblage of new works, but within the context of a long history of creative arts. The visitor encountered an entire wall as a work of art.

Through these seemingly mundane discrete actions, these men marshaled their individual agency to push against the existing model and provide a new forum for public formation. These actions accumulated into ongoing projects, that while not explicitly articulated or planned in the aggregate, resulted in valid forms of public making. To borrow a term from Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach’s article “The Universal Survey Museum,” visitors to museums, such as the Pennsylvania Museum, entered “ritual spaces,” where their response to the works of art amounted to a well-rehearsed

³⁶⁹ Wilson and Yachnin, *Making Publics*, 3.

performance, which bracketed the experience.³⁷⁰ The art was presented as the most cherished objects of the culture and the response of the viewer charged with awe and reverence cannot help but be pre-conditioned by the imposing, neoclassical setting. From this perspective, Johnson and Barnes offered alternative spaces, free of the grandiose architectural setting, where the viewer would be invited, or coerced, to consider relations between the works of art without a clear guide as to how they were to respond. In its ideal form, this eschews a ritualized approach and engages the public in the shaping of new forms of knowledge. The ideal faded over time due to limited access to the works of art and Barnes' method grew stale as devotees mimicked his approach by rote.

What was at stake for both of these men was to determine how art would be presented to the people of Philadelphia. But what helped form their ideas about art and the public? Neither man ever promoted anything resembling Jarves' idea that open access to museums might placate workers, or be used to lure them away from the public houses.³⁷¹ This chapter will try to account for this difference in approach by individually charting the roots of their shared belief in the power of art to improve the quality of one's life, by way of the teaching of John Ruskin, as transmitted primarily through Roger Fry. To follow this through, it will be useful to track their vision for the public, from the time of their individual bequests, through the reception by future publics. For Johnson this will focus on his public writings and his will. For Barnes, I will trace theories of art education and the public from his early writings through his connection with John Dewey. A

³⁷⁰ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* Vol. 3 No. 4 (1980): 448-451.

³⁷¹ Barrett, *Museums*, 53.

complete consideration of the public will include considering how each collection faced changes as they encountered new publics in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

While Johnson and Barnes shaped publics for art by challenging the existing model and there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of their shared interest in providing access to the working class, their approaches in the end did little to address the social problems of inadequate social and cultural capital rooted in the research and writings of Pierre Bourdieu. Johnson was concerned with the undue influence of wealthy collectors who did not care at all about art, but did not leave anything like a map for social change. Likewise, Barnes' rhetoric pointed a finger of blame at the shortcomings of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in its lack of appeal to ordinary citizens. In practice, with its overwhelming focus on aesthetic education, his institution did little to change the social make-up of his audience. However, by taking positions, staking claims, refusing to leave objects to the municipal museum, and challenging existing methods of arts education, these men forced a dialectical reaction from others and publics were shaped.

What makes these case studies compelling at the opening of the twenty-first century, is that we are living in a time of profound wealth inequality, with disparities not witnessed since the Gilded Age. History is repeating itself as tremendously wealthy individuals, such as American entrepreneur Eli Broad, with an estimated net worth of \$7.4 billion, and Alice Walton of the Wal-Mart family, with an estimated net worth of \$38.2 billion, have opened single collection museums.³⁷² By reflecting on the

³⁷² Inge Jackson Reist and David Cannadine, *British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response: Reflections Across the Pond* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 22. They point out that the practice of single collection museums had entirely vanished, the Norton Simon, J. Paul Getty, and Hammer Museums, were all founded after WW II in California.

complicated histories of the bequests of Johnson and Barnes—especially how future publics received them—we can begin to map forward how the agency of the collector might factor into the fate of these type of single collection institutions in the years to come.

John G. Johnson and the Public

Johnson was active as a collector from 1876 to 1917, a period when American arts institutions were beginning to take shape. While the Pennsylvania Museum of Art looked to the South Kensington Museum, individual collectors, including Johnson and Barnes, were attracted to the approach of a new breed of British industrialists turned collectors in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Henry Tate and Edward Guinness.³⁷³ Johnson was an anglophile. He began traveling abroad regularly in 1878, and made London his home base for visits to art sites in Europe each summer thereafter. As a collector, he drew on models from Britain both in terms of theory and practice. The familiarity with the language might have been a factor—unlike Barnes he did not speak a second language—as it gave him direct access to art publications and catalogs. London was the hub of a burgeoning art market in the final decades of the nineteenth century, featuring well-established auction houses and countless new art dealers and galleries. Johnson made purchases in London Galleries on Pall Mall as early as 1882, including Agnew and Sons and Blakeslee & Co. What must have struck Johnson, and other American collectors, was the well-established public for art (albeit one divided greatly by class) that had relatively easy access to viewing masterpieces, both ancient and modern,

³⁷³ Reist and Cannadine, *British*, 3.

in national museums, such as the National Gallery, founded in 1824 and the British Museum, founded in 1753. His experience is akin to revelations by American artists, including Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley a century earlier or Mary Cassatt and Henry Ossawa Tanner in Johnson's own time, who encountered a dynamic world of art overseas.

In terms of practice, two prominent English bequests guided Johnson's developing interest in art collecting and the public: the Chantry Bequest, which was granted in 1878 and enacted over the final decades of the century, and the establishment of the Wallace Collection in 1897. Sir Francis Leggatt Chantrey, an English sculptor, donated funds to be used for the acquisition of art for the nation. After the death of his widow, artwork was purchased each year for public display. In his book of 1892, Johnson wrote, "[Swan's] *Prodigal Son*, in the South Kensington Museum, is the best among the pictures purchased with the funds of the Chantrey Bequest."³⁷⁴ This example offered the American collector a ready model for how works of art might be transferred from private to public collections. He put this knowledge directly into practice when he was given the responsibility, as part of the Fairmount Park Commission, to make purchases on behalf of the Wilstach Collection, beginning in 1890s. This ongoing project allowed Johnson to set aside his own desires as a collector to consider what type of paintings might best suit the needs of the viewing public at the newly formed Pennsylvania Museum. For example, he purchased a painting by James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Black (The Lady in the Yellow Buskin)*, c. 1883. He wrote of the artist in his 1892 book, "Whistler,

³⁷⁴ Johnson, *Sight-Seeing*, 11. John Macallan Swan, *The Prodigal Son*, Oil on canvas, 1888, 1118 x 1575 mm, Tate Britain. The purchases were originally housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum, but later permanently installed at the Tate.

who, though his reputation long pendulated between that of the harlequin and of the master, is now universally conceded to be the latter.”³⁷⁵ In correspondence with the custodian, E. A. Shrunck, he distinguished between paintings bought for himself and those for the Wilstach Collection.

Will you send to my house a wagon with two men, to take away some pictures which I am giving to the Park [Wilstach was displayed in Fairmount Park]? Some are large ones. Amongst these, however, is an exceedingly fine Pieter de Hooch, which I bought this summer for the Park and which is not a gift from myself.³⁷⁶

His level of engagement with the paintings was remarkable, bearing in mind these were not even his; in 1902, in an earlier letter to the caretaker he asks that only soft coal be used in the furnaces at Memorial Hall so as to not injure the paintings.³⁷⁷

For his own collection, the bequest made by Lady Wallace to establish the Wallace Collection, which opened in 1900 was of great importance.³⁷⁸ The collecting practices were not as much a factor for Johnson, especially considering that the Wallace Collection had not been assembled by a single individual; far more significant was the example set by the bequest itself for future collectors, especially in America. The artwork was to remain together in Hertford House, as arranged by her late husband, Richard Wallace, and was to never be loaned. Interestingly, in addition to these stipulations, of key significance for collectors such as Stewart-Gardner, was that the Wallace Collection

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 8.

³⁷⁶ Johnson to Miss Shrunck, Custodian, The Wilstach Collection of Paintings, Memorial Hall, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 29, 1912. Wilstach Collection Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

³⁷⁷ Johnson to Miss Shrunck, Custodian, The Wilstach Collection of Paintings, Memorial Hall, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 15, 1902. Wilstach Collection Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

³⁷⁸ Reist and Cannadine, *British Models*, 129. “It is clear that she was by this act following the wishes of her husband, who certainly raised the possibility with the government during his own lifetime.”

be displayed freely to the public. As noted in 1971 by the director Sir Francis Watson, however, the actual bequest “didn’t even say it should be shown to the public at all except by implication in her phrase about creating a special museum to contain the said collection.”³⁷⁹ Regardless, American collectors, including Johnson, adopted the model for their collection museums. While it is known that his colleagues, Frick and Morgan visited the Wallace Collection, there is only circumstantial evidence that Johnson did so.³⁸⁰ He owned a copy of a provisional catalog of the Collection, published before it even opened. His mailing address in London, 120 Pall Mall, was a pleasant mile walk from the Wallace Collection. Furthermore, by way of Roger Fry, he had met with Claude Phillips, first curator of the Wallace Collection, from 1897-1912, on at least two separate occasions.³⁸¹ It has also never been confirmed whether Barnes visited the Wallace Collection, but he was well aware of its significance; in a response to an inquiry about the Johnson Collection after his mentor’s death, he wrote: “Mr. Johnson’s left his collection to the City in very much the same manner as the Wallace collection in London.”³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Letter from Sir Francis Watson (Director of the Wallace Collection) to Alec Martin (Chairman of the Wallace Collection), April 14, 1971, Papers of Sir Francis Watson, Wallace Collection Library and Archive.

³⁸⁰ Esmée Quodbach notices that not only did Americans collectors famously visit the Wallace Collection after it opened to the public, but also that visits by Frick, Mellon, Stewart Gardner, and Morgan have been documented before it opened. Esmée Quodbach, “The Last of the American Versailles: The Widener Collection at Lynnewood Hall,” *Simiolus* (2002): 45.

³⁸¹ Fry to Johnson, September 20, 1907, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. “P.S. I forgot to say how much Claude Phillips enjoyed meeting you.” Fry to Johnson, May 29, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. “Looking forward to this visit to London—Claude Phillips shall come.”

³⁸² Barnes to Percy Moore Turner, December 5, 1917, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Regarding theory, the ideas of John Ruskin and Roger Fry were paramount for shaping his thinking about art and the public. Johnson held books by Ruskin in his library, including those one might expect to find in a thinking man's art historical library: *Stones of Venice* and *Modern Painters*, but also *A Popular Handbook To The National Gallery: Including, By Special Permission, Notes Collected From The Works Of Mr. Ruskin* (1888), and *Ruskin on Pictures: A Collection of Criticisms by John Ruskin* (1902). Johnson may also have known of some of Ruskin's monthly pamphlets addressed to the workingmen of England until 1884.³⁸³ It is likely that he came to Ruskin of his own accord, but the application of these teachings on art and the public were sharpened by way of Fry, and somewhat Berenson.

In the first decade of the twentieth century Johnson, the already public-minded and mature collector, began working closely with advisors Bernard Berenson and Roger Fry. In the previous chapter it was shown how these men, and others, sharpened his aesthetic judgment. Equally decisive for Johnson, however, was their direct connection to Ruskin. Berenson had studied under Charles Elliot Norton at Harvard; he had drifted from his teacher on matters of style, but maintained an interest in fostering aesthetic enjoyment for all people. Fry, who was mentored by Berenson, and would make his mark in the field of modern art theory, was also a student of Ruskin.³⁸⁴ Christopher Reed argues, "To explain the culture that produced Roger Fry, it would be difficult to

³⁸³ John Ruskin and Dinah Birch, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

³⁸⁴ Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 19. "There can be little doubt that Ruskin was a formative influence on Fry as the writer who inspired him to defect from his scientific studies to the realms of art criticism and connoisseurship."

overemphasize the importance of Ruskin.”³⁸⁵ Another Ruskin scholar Andrew Leng pointed to a famous passage by Virginia Woolf where she claimed, “Roger Fry is Ruskin’s principal heir and beneficiary.”³⁸⁶ For Johnson, who first met Fry in 1905, he embodied a discourse on art and the public that ultimately helped him to map out his own bequest.

Fry was a founding member of two initiatives in Britain around the turn of the twentieth century that involved public access to works of art: the establishment of the National Art Collections Fund and the launch of the *Burlington Magazine*. The National Art Collections Fund was created to increase the number of public artworks available by helping museums and other institutions to make acquisitions. This project echoed Ruskinian sentiments and was so successful that it is still in existence to today. Johnson owned a catalog of an exhibition of old masters sponsored by the National Art Collections Fund at the Grafton Galleries in 1911.³⁸⁷ Fry helped to start the *Burlington Magazine* in 1903, which had a broad goal to promote art history with collectors and other members of the art public.³⁸⁸ Johnson was a subscriber and assisted Fry in spreading the word to his friends Widener and others. Still Fry lamented to Johnson in 1911, that with all the interest in collecting, “American subscriptions to *Burlington* are so

³⁸⁵ Reed, *Roger Fry*, 167.

³⁸⁶ Andrew Leng, “Enduring Ruskin? Bloomsbury’s Anxieties of Influence” in *Persistent Ruskin: Studies in Influence, Assimilation and Effect* Eds. Keith Hanley and Brian Maidment (Aldershot, Hants, England: Burlington, VT, 2013), 105. “[Fry’s] multiple careers, and strategic position in the twentieth century art world, would not have been possible had Ruskin not convinced the Victorians of the supreme importance of visual culture.”

³⁸⁷ *A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Old Masters in aid of the National Art-Collections Fund: Grafton Galleries, 1911* (London: P.L. Warner, Publisher to the Medici Society, 1911).

³⁸⁸ Mary Lago, *Christiana Herringham and the Edwardian Art Scene* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996), 87.

low at only 200 copies.”³⁸⁹ The date of this letter points to a period of transition in Fry’s professional life, what Reed refers to as a “pivot from connoisseurship to education.”³⁹⁰ After J.P. Morgan dismissed him as curator of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1909, he took on two teaching positions. At the Slade School of Fine Art at University College London he taught art history to art students and he also led a series of experimental workshops, known as the Omega Workshops, which pushed perceived boundaries between styles and materials. These workshops in particular show how Fry was questioning the limits of traditional art education to address the new challenges posed by Modern art. On the heels of his 1910 and 1912 Post-Impressionist shows at the Grafton Galleries, this was not merely a matter of whim, or a scholar moving from one interest to another; it marked a shift in his thinking about his role as writer and critic, a reconsideration of his obligation to map the theoretical field necessary to bring modern art in line with the broader history of art.

Fry was disillusioned with the art world he had known. In his 1920 volume of collected essays, *Vision and Design*, in the chapter “Retrospect,” he explained that when he returned to the study of formal design, a topic he had overlooked for many years, he was surprised that members of the “cultured public” who he had worked with for a decade now regarded him as “slightly insane.”³⁹¹ He was disappointed that those who could see the merits of carefully studying Renaissance paintings brushed aside any such

³⁸⁹ Roger Fry to Johnson, August 5, 1908, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. “I do hope you succeed in interesting Widener in the Burlington Magazine.” Then on low subscriptions: Roger Fry to Johnson, February 4, 1911, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

³⁹⁰ Reed, *Roger Fry*, 239.

³⁹¹ Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (Dover Publications, 2000), 192.

need to carefully analyze a Matisse. He does not explicitly excuse Johnson in his critique, although his obituary for Johnson published in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1917 suggests that his opinion of him had not diminished.³⁹² The world of museums, which often blended public and private interest frustrated Fry. He claimed that Morgan gleaned paintings for his own collection over the Metropolitan Museum. He complained of this very matter to Johnson in letters, more than once, and this irritation resonated with the lawyer-collector at the very time he was coming to terms with the future of his collection.³⁹³

Johnson's Bequest

The leisure moments of my life have been spent in making this collection. My hope has always been that it will be accepted by the CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, upon the not onerous conditions I will impose. I have lived my life in this City. I want the collection to have its home here; but if the conditions be not accepted, it must go elsewhere.³⁹⁴

Johnson broadly conceived of his public as the citizens of Philadelphia. When he wrote his Will in 1912, he decided to leave his collection, not to the Pennsylvania Museum, but to the City of Philadelphia. Trustees for his estate would oversee the collection to avoid politicians getting their hands on it. In this original document, Johnson stated that if he were to own a house suitable then his collection would remain there, but if that was not the case, then the City must begin building a structure to house his collection within six

³⁹² Roger E. Fry, "Mr. John G. Johnson of Philadelphia," *The Burlington Magazine* (May 1917): 203-4.

³⁹³ Reed, *Roger Fry*, 238.

³⁹⁴ Will of John G. Johnson, deceased. Copy of Eli K. Price. Annotated 1917. John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

months of his death. In this paragraph he even offered suggestions of models to follow, mentioning the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, which had low ceilings and provided plenty of natural light.³⁹⁵ In 1915, three years after he had drafted this initial will, Johnson purchased the house next door at 510 South Broad Street. In the autumn of that year he was shaken by the death of his close friend Peter A. B. Widener.³⁹⁶ By February of 1916 he seems to have made up his mind in a letter to Berenson:

I have gotten settled in my new house, which is very much larger than the old and has unusually good light, both east, west and south. It is my intention to give it, with its contents, instead of giving the contents to be stored in a Gallery to be built by our politicians.³⁹⁷

Here he seemed concerned that those in charge at the Pennsylvania Museum would glean the perceived masterpieces to display in the galleries they were planning to construct, and hid the rest away in storage. History has shown with the reinstallation of only a fraction of his collection in the 1990s throughout the entire Museum that he was not wrong. Of course, his was not a collection based on masterpieces, and he was justified in his worry that many in positions of power would entirely miss the point of his life's work as a collector. As one of the nation's premier lawyers, one can imagine there were plenty of precedents for Johnson to draw on. One particular case, which might have contributed to his wariness to leave his collection at risk, involved a million-dollar bequest to the Library Company of Philadelphia by the estate of Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1877. On his deathbed, Rush decided that a new library building, the Ridgeway Library, named for his

³⁹⁵ Lloyd DeWitt, "They Leave Us," 86.

³⁹⁶ "John G. Johnson's Art," *Time* November 10, 1941. "Before he died, he had barked: "I don't intend my pictures shall ever be used as bait for the construction of any blankety blank marble palace."

³⁹⁷ Johnson to Berenson, February 18, 1916, John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

wife, Phoebe Anne Ridgeway Rush, would be built on South Broad Street. The Library Company considered this site too far from its members and the broader neighborhood to be unsuitable. Johnson upheld the will of Rush and the building was built at Broad and Christian streets in Philadelphia.³⁹⁸ This case oddly foreshadowed his own struggle with the City of Philadelphia to accept his art collection on his terms. Just a few months before he died on April 13, 1917, Johnson modified his will adding a codicil or section, which effectively designated his then current house as the site of a public museum to display his collection to the public.

Johnson's Ill-Fated House Museum

Remarkably, city officials were slow to respond to Johnson's bequest, but accepted his terms within the time limit by the end of 1917. What was at stake for representatives of the City was the success of the Pennsylvania Museum planned for atop Fairmount hill. It seems that they were counting on Johnson's paintings to fill out their holdings of European paintings. The entire collection was immediately placed in storage until his house could be fitted as a museum space, and the city did very little towards this goal for the first few years after his death. The state of things was nicely summed up in 1920 in a letter from Barnes to Martin A. Ryerson, a collector who would make his own bequest to the Art Institute of Chicago:

The status of the Johnson collection is still in the same chaotic condition as when you asked me about it last winter. Mr. Johnson's stipulation in his will that the collection be retained in his house has been set aside by the

³⁹⁸ Weigley, Wainwright, and Wolf, *Philadelphia: A 300*, 423. Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, 220. The Library Company was forced to sell it to the City in 1944 to avoid bankruptcy. It is currently the site of The Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts.

Courts on the ground that the house was a fire-trap. The efforts of the executors of his will to have the city erect a gallery on the Parkway solely for his pictures have been definitely turned down by the Mayor who in his refusal stated that the only way the collection would be available for the public would be as a part of the general collection which is to be housed in the new art gallery now under construction by the city. In the meantime, practically all of the pictures are still in storage but they are being separately exhibited in the Wilstach Gallery in groups of about sixty, and their exhibition is attended by a great number of people.³⁹⁹

However, the situation was not benign, during this period politicians were actively conspiring to undo the conditions of the Will, and move the paintings to the new museum. A passage written by Joseph E. Widener, who was then President of the Philadelphia Art Jury, which was created in 1911 to oversee and approve plans for civic structures with an eye towards keeping the City beautiful, reveals how many Philadelphians were thinking about the Johnson Collection not long after his death in the Art Jury Annual Report of 1917:

The City has accepted the bequests of William L. and George W. Elkins. When in addition there are to be not only the Wilstach Collection, but the John G. Johnson Collection, the superb opportunity of the City to create an effective magnet for the money of tourists, as well as an agency for the cultural education of its citizens, will be realized.⁴⁰⁰

The drama played out in the papers. Longtime columnist for the Philadelphia Bulletin, James Smart, uncovered headlines from the end of 1918 that show the City's ambition to acquire the paintings for the new museum, "Parkway Temple for Johnson Art," and "Great Structure On Parkway; Will is an Obstacle."⁴⁰¹ The new location for the Pennsylvania Museum had been agreed upon in 1919 and construction began in 1921. In

³⁹⁹ Barnes to Martin A. Ryerson, October 2, 1920, Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴⁰⁰ Philadelphia (Pa.). *Art Jury, Annual Report* (1924), 13.

⁴⁰¹ James Smart, "Another Will Overturned by Politicians Chestnut Hill's Own Version of a Barnes Collection" *Chestnut Hill Local* (July 12, 2012), 23.

May of that year, according to George Norris, the City petitioned for permission to sell the Johnson house, citing the neighborhood as unsuitable, but a judge in the Orphan's court denied this request. The next year, an ordinance was introduced to extend a small street, Naudain Street, through to Broad Street, but in order to complete this project the Johnson house would have to be removed.⁴⁰² While these attempts failed, the City persisted; in 1922, in a publication titled *The New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia*, the Johnson Collection was grouped alongside four other bequests, such as the Wilstach, that were already the property of the Museum, "The bequests of five individuals have made the Philadelphia city collection first in America for paintings."

There were two fundamental points of disagreement between the collector and the City. First, it was important to Johnson that his collection remain together as a unit to preserve the sense of the history of European painting he intended to display. His Will clearly stated that his works were not to be "mingled in any way with any other collection or paintings or works of art."⁴⁰³ For the City's perspective, they were concerned with filling wall space for the benefit of all Philadelphians and were willing to disregard the wishes of a single collector to achieve that goal. Second, the City saw the location of his home, on the heavily trafficked end of South Broad Street as unsuitable. A picture of the neighborhood was offered by British writer, Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith who took a taxi there in 1930, "And there, amid automobile and radio stores and pseudo-Persian restaurants and the tenements of the negro quarter [sic], we found a dingy, red-brick,

⁴⁰² George W. Norris, "The Johnson Art Collection: An Open Letter to the Mayor and City Council," April 24, 1922, John G. Johnson correspondence, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

⁴⁰³ *New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: publisher not identified, 1922), 8; 20. John G. Johnson Correspondence Archives, John G. Johnson Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

slate-roof house of the most depressing 1870 style.”⁴⁰⁴ According to a handful of his champions, Johnson was aware of the controversy his bequest would cause. His friend, Harrison Morris, former director of Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, wrote to Barnes in 1921:

[Ralph Adams Cram and Frank Jewett Mather] entirely agree with me in my effort to keep the Johnson house as a separate gallery for the enjoyment and enlightenment of the people in a congested district. Mr. Johnson knew the principle at stake, and left his bequest according. The ignorant shrimps who tore the picture and art objects from the house did not know this. They are in the grip of adroit dealers, who have motives of their own, and of politicians who are building a monumental job at the head of the parkway.⁴⁰⁵

Despite the long-term failure of his house museum, it did not go down without a fight. For all the chaos perpetuated by the City, a chorus of prominent voices stepped up to articulate Johnson’s wishes and attempted to save his museum. Most prominent were George Norris, Frank Jewett Mather, Harrison Morris, Ralph Adams Cram, and Albert C. Barnes. In an odd and unrelated public dispute over media criticism of an exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1921, Barnes taunted his opponent that if he were to lose the proposed wager, that he would pay for and build a gallery to house his collection and build it “big enough to house, in addition, the art collection left to Philadelphia by the late John G. Johnson.”⁴⁰⁶ Private letters suggest that Barnes was, at least in part, considering this as an option. Barnes also wrote letters to Eli K. Price and art historian, Georg Swarzenski, informing them that he was “making an effort to rescue the

⁴⁰⁴ Hinks and Royde-Smith, *Pictures and People*, 130.

⁴⁰⁵ Harrison Morris to Barnes, September 15, 1921, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴⁰⁶ “Counter Attack in Fight on Modernists,” *American Art News*, October 15, 1921): 1. Quote in Meyers, *Art, Education*, 61.

fine pictures of the Johnson Collection” and was looking for assistance.⁴⁰⁷ In 1921, Barnes even reached out to Joseph E. Widener, the son of P. A. B. Widener, whom perhaps he thought due to his father’s close relationship with Johnson might be sympathetic to the cause. Widener simply told Barnes “until the City created a corporation along the lines of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, situations like the one with the Johnson estate will continue to be problematic.”⁴⁰⁸

In spring of 1922, art historian, Frank Jewett Mather wrote to the Metropolitan Museum asking for an investigation into the art dealings of the city of Philadelphia. Mather was a former colleague of both Berenson and Fry, and had advised Johnson at times in the last decade of the lawyer’s life. There were public pleas as well, such as George Norris’ open letter to the mayor and city council in 1922, imploring them to adhere to Johnson’s vision and uphold their end of the bargain. Norris clearly laid out the history of the Johnson Collection and testified to Johnson’s moral character and good intentions that led to his generous bequest.⁴⁰⁹

After a few false starts, the Johnson House Museum was opened consistently to the public in October of 1923. Only around one quarter of the holdings—337 paintings by one estimate—could be displayed at any one time due to a lack of space.⁴¹⁰ The

⁴⁰⁷ Barnes to Georg Swarzenski, April 24, 1928, and Barnes to Eli K. Price, 1928, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA. He seemed to be interested in have knowledge of specific paintings that had been overlooked and placed in storage.

⁴⁰⁸ Widener to Barnes, September 19, 1921, Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴⁰⁹ George W. Norris, “The Johnson Art Collection: An Open Letter to the Mayor and City Council,” April 24, 1922, John G. Johnson correspondence, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

⁴¹⁰ Bell to Ethelwyn Manning, June 12, 1928, Henry Clay Frick Papers, Series I: Art Files. The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives. Bell, then curator of

Collection remained there until 1933 when after public hearings, a judge finally ruled in the City's favor that the house was not a safe place to display the paintings because of fire hazard, and they were moved "temporarily" to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.⁴¹¹ In less than a decade, Johnson's House Museum gave interested publics an alternative to what the Pennsylvania Museum had to offer. Those defending his collection formed a public interested in preserving the integrity of a single collection. A public formed around education, which included various lectures and seminars. This included talks by art historian, Richard Offner, from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 1926 and 1927 and even Barnes spoke there in 1928.⁴¹² In a letter to Glackens, "It looks as if I won't see you on Thursday. We hold a class that afternoon at the Johnson collection and I am due to talk on primitives."⁴¹³ Theodore Dillaway, the Director of Art Education for Philadelphia public schools was also purported to provide access for Philadelphia students in the early 1930s.⁴¹⁴ There was the art-viewing public typified by Royde-Smith who found it listed in "the Hotel Guest Book among laundries and beauty-shops" and wrote of the galleries, "there are almost as many first-class paintings among the cobwebs in those bare, carpetless rooms, hanging over some perfectly atrocious pieces of fake

the Johnson Collection, made this estimate in a letter to Ethelwyn Manning, librarian of the Frick, 1928.

⁴¹¹ Philadelphia Museum of Art, *John G. Johnson Collection: Catalogue of Italian Paintings* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1966), xiv.

⁴¹² Strehlke, *Italian Paintings*, 12. Strehlke claims they were seminars on the Johnson collection. I have found no evidence of this, but notes of the paintings discussed, taken by Daphne Hoffman, are held at the Frick Library. Offner may have been directed to the Johnson House by Sidney Fiske Kimball who had founded the graduate program at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 1923 and had since 1925 been director of the Pennsylvania Museum in 1925.

⁴¹³ Barnes to Glackens, March 12, 1928, quoted in Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Eight: The Artists Who Freed American Art* (New York City: Writers & Readers Pub. in association with Tenth Avenue Eds., 1990), 167.

⁴¹⁴ This was told to me by Johnson Collection curator, Jennifer Thompson.

furniture as there are in the Isabella Stuart Gardner Palazzo.”⁴¹⁵ There were no means to capture the actions of the general public or the popular audience beyond attendance statistics, which report that they came each year by the thousands. Once the paintings were moved to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1933, the sundry publics that assembled around Johnson’s house museum, if they chose to visit the paintings thereafter, would need to norm to existing practices at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Thus the public making process that began with the bequest gave way to the prevailing model and effectively obscured the efforts of the collector by century’s end.

In the final analysis of Johnson’s legacy, there are two broad historical periods to consider: the first involves the public as mapped out by the collector in his Will and at his short-lived museum and the second concerns the publics that arrived later with their own priorities. The Johnson Collection underwent two disruptions in the second postscript period. First, when it officially opened at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1941, Johnson’s vision of displaying his collection in total was eviscerated. While it is true his House Museum could not accommodate all 1,279 paintings, it was not dispositive until this date that it would never happen. The Johnson Collection simply became the 575 paintings, selected for display in 20 consecutive galleries.⁴¹⁶ The vision of the collector would now, out of necessity, be mediated outward from the curators to the executive level to the board of trustees at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This is not to say that no one had a sincere interest in upholding Johnson’s vision, but they could not do otherwise but exacerbate the unraveling of his legacy, by selecting and arranging the collection

⁴¹⁵ Hinks and Royde-Smith, *Pictures and People*, 134.

⁴¹⁶ “Famous Johnson Collection Installed in Philadelphia Museum,” *The Art Digest* 16 (November, 1941): 8, 28.

according to a series of judgments borne of waves of circumstances relevant to running a large museum in the fifth largest city in the country. For most of the twentieth century, Johnson's galleries, while prominently located on the first floor, were not easily distinguished from other sections of the same museum named for similarly prominent collectors.

The second disruption occurred in 1993 when Johnson's paintings were broken up and reinstalled throughout the rest of the museum. In the throes of the new museology, which reevaluated every aspect of the institution through a lens that shifted from "objects to ideas," new educational initiatives were undertaken and public programming was expanded. In the midst of all this, stakeholders at the Philadelphia Museum of Art saw the opportunity to make the Johnson paintings more useful by reintegrating them within the wider holdings of European paintings.⁴¹⁷ While it may be argued that reinstalling Johnson's collection made sense didactically as part of a larger narrative of the history of art, ultimately the public could not view the collection as intended by the collector.

Dr. Albert C. Barnes and the Public

Barnes actively collected over the first three decades of the twentieth century, which was a time of tremendous change in America and Europe. Modern technology was reshaping the way ordinary people lived and worked; modern philosophy and psychology were recasting all manner of human knowledge. Barnes found opportunity amidst this

⁴¹⁷ Stephen E. Weil, *Rethinking the Museum: And Other Meditations* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 59. As part of the same 1989 renovation project, the Philadelphia Museum of Art made several changes to the Rodin Museum, including regrouping the sculpture collection "to better articulate Rodin's major themes and subjects." Peter Linett, "Haunted, Happily: Why The Barnes Case Matters," *Curator: The Museum Journal*. 47, no. 2 (2004): 134.

chaos professionally by inventing, manufacturing, and marketing a wonder drug, Argyrol, and as a collector by choosing to assemble pieces by mostly living artists, who were not yet in great demand and thus affordable, primarily works of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. The world of American art collecting approached a crescendo in the years leading up to World War I, then fell silent as markets faltered under the impact of the war. One by one the great players left the stage; by 1929, Widener, Morgan, Johnson, Frick, the Havemeyers, and Stewart-Gardner were all gone.⁴¹⁸ As a member of the next generation, Barnes was a man who embodied the spirit of progress and utopian ideals that typified the modernist project. Due to his great wealth, sharp intellect, and the many networks he could leverage, he was well positioned to apply the lessons of those who came before, especially Johnson, to his mission of building and sharing a collection with a new art public of working people that had formerly been kept out of the conversation.⁴¹⁹

Barnes began his education experiment at his factory around 1908, and later expanded it to include display and analysis of the paintings he collected after 1912. As Rudenstine suggested, his early experience studying and working in Germany, first in 1894 and again in 1900, might have exposed him to European ideas about extending educational opportunities to ordinary workers.⁴²⁰ Moreover, Barnes' library included books by British writers, including Ruskin, Fry, and George Moore, whose ideas would

⁴¹⁸ Ronni Baer, "Collecting Dutch Paintings in Boston," in *Holland's Golden Age in America* Ed. by Esmée Quodbach (The Frick Collection; University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 98.

⁴¹⁹ Albert C. Barnes, *New Republic* (March 14, 1923): 66. "Things created by living people and in the writings of gifted thinkers, which [had] been the means of stimulating business life and afford[ed] a sensible use of leisure in a class of people to whom such doors are usually locked."

⁴²⁰ Rudenstine, *The House of*, 11. He specifically mentions the example of German Union practices.

have been useful regarding matters of art and the public.⁴²¹ He was developing his educational theories over the exact ten-year span that he was communicating with Johnson. As the aging attorney contemplated his legacy, he was still crystalizing his own ideas regarding art and the public. So rather than the transfer of rote lessons from mentor to protégé, the two men were concurrently thinking through related issues. Of course, Barnes was not yet focused on his bequest as much as developing an educational method to explain the modern art he collected. He engaged with the ideas of Roger Fry seeing the potential of a formalist approach to art to upset existing academic hierarchies, offering a way around hegemonic practices of elites and aristocrats while providing access to working people.⁴²² Barnes would have especially enjoyed Fry's confrontational tone in an essay published in *The Nation* in 1912, "The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia."⁴²³ In the article Fry characterizes his response to critics of his second Post-Impressionist Show as a "speech for the defense." Barnes would later thrive on confronting those who attempted to dismiss the merits of twentieth-century art, and saw a larger mission in the struggle.

Both Barnes and Johnson were intent on expanding the audience for art and addressing the undue influence of the wealthy that dictated cultural politics to everyone else. However, with his push towards arts education, Barnes diverged from his mentor, who never articulated specific educational methods, and was more focused on presenting an instructive view onto a history of European painting. It was with Dewey that Barnes

⁴²¹ Moore was a writer and art critic whose essays on modern painting brought Impressionist sensibilities to acceptance among the British public. Barnes quoted Moore in his very first published article, "How to Judge a Painting" 1915. Johnson also owned books by Moore.

⁴²² Reed, *Roger Fry*, 170. "Fry saw formalism as a way of wresting art away from the upper classes."

⁴²³ *Ibid*, 112-116. Originally published in *The Nation*, November 9, 1912, 249-251.

found a solution to the matter by deciding on an educational institution rather than a traditional single collector house museum. In 1923 he wrote to Edith Dimock, Glackens' wife, "The central idea, in its larger aspects, was put into my head by John Dewey about five years ago when he learned of the work we had been doing here."⁴²⁴ Dewey was the key with which Barnes pulled together his thinking on art and the public.

Barnes first used Dewey's *How We Think* in his factory courses in 1911, the year after it was published. He later recalled that it "brought me a means of clarifying and adapting what we had read to the needs of most of the other employees."⁴²⁵ In other words Dewey helped him to lay a foundation as a teacher, especially in reaching those with little formal education. As his interests shifted to aesthetics he would connect Dewey's ideas about the shared experience of thinking to Fry's insistence on looking to the formal elements of a work of art as a means to get around the barriers of prior art historical knowledge and the analysis of subject matter. By way of Fry's writings, Barnes came to value experience of the object as central to appreciating art, while Dewey provided the means to apply those lessons to matters of education. It may have been Dewey's *Democracy and Education* of 1916 that convinced Barnes that he and the pragmatic philosopher should join forces.⁴²⁶

In the planning process for the Foundation, Barnes told Dewey that he imagined being open three days a week to the public, and three days for art students at neighboring

⁴²⁴ Barnes to Edith Dimock, February 19, 1923. Presidents' Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴²⁵ Albert C. Barnes, "The Barnes Foundation," *New Republic* (March 14, 1923): 65.

⁴²⁶ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 42. Rudenstine, *The House*, 11. In his later book *Art as Experience* of 1934, Dewey put forward a more complete theory of the value of an experiential approach to art. See Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 262.

institutions, such as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.⁴²⁷ It was reported in the press that the collection might be made public; *Arts Magazine* reported in January 1923, “This great collection of modern art is getting a permanent setting, and being opened to the general public.”⁴²⁸ This is surprising considering that after 1925, only students enrolled in courses were allowed entry, and it was not open at all to the public, except by permission of Barnes himself. It is possible that Barnes retreated after confrontation with critics and members of the art-viewing public, who were dismissive of his 75 paintings included in the *Exhibition of Contemporary European Painting and Sculpture* at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in spring of 1923. Or as Rudenstine claims, it may have resulted from the faculty’s frustration with the inability of early students and visitors to overcome the constraints of the little art knowledge they recalled from college.⁴²⁹ It could also be true that as he planned the curriculum, there was simply too much at stake to replicate the prevailing public museum model, as at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In order to provide a genuine alternative, he needed to shape a different art public.

We can read Barnes’ notion of the public for his Collection from later reflections in interviews and letters. In the famous interviews with Carl W. McCardle in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1942 Barnes said:

What we are trying to do at the Foundation has never been attempted before—that is, to link an objective study of pictures to the powers possessed by every normal human being and to do it with the aid of

⁴²⁷ Barnes to John Dewey, October 16, 1922. Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Quoted in Robert Cozzolino, “PAFA and Dr. Barnes,” *American Art* 27, 3 (2013): 24.

⁴²⁸ Meyers, *Art, Education*, 69. Quotes Forbes Watson, “The Barnes Foundation,” *Arts Magazine* (January 1923): 9, 13.

⁴²⁹ Neil L. Rudenstine, “Albert Barnes and His Foundation: Three Paradoxes,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 158, no. 2 (2014): 123.

respectable educational methods...we prefer that they be poor, and they have to be earnest.⁴³⁰

He included similar language about access for working people in the Indenture of Trust that created the Barnes Foundation.⁴³¹ If one were working class, or middle class, you could enroll in a course, or gain access by permission, as long as you had the right mindset; however, the question of access included a type of means test. You had to be willing to acknowledge that to understand modern art one need put in many hours of close observation before the art objects. Because the Barnes was closed to the general public for most of its history, it's most significant audience were the thousands of students that enrolled in courses at the Foundation for the past 90 years. The archives include lists of student names, but there has not been a comprehensive study as to who these students were. Naturally, since courses were offered on weekdays, the targeted audience of working people largely missed the mark.

Barnes repeatedly insisted, as a way to distinguish his mission, that the Foundation was not a place of leisure or entertainment. Yet, academics and scholars were mostly excluded, but not universally, as a public. Art historian, Erwin Panofsky, and museum curator, Alfred Barr, were blocked, while philosophers Bertrand Russell and George Santayana were welcomed. Perhaps in memory of his rejection at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1923, he typically reserved his most vitriolic responses for the flattened category of Philadelphia elite; in a pamphlet from 1938, "A

⁴³⁰ McCardle, "The Terrible-Tempered," 68. McCardle reports that this was in response to Archibald MacLeish, editor of *Fortune*, who in 1935 inquired about writing an article about Barnes.

⁴³¹ Barnes Foundation, Indenture of Trust. Albert C. Barnes Correspondence, Barnes Foundation Archives. "Plain people, that is, men and women who make their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores, and similar places, have free access to the sustenance that art offers."

Disgrace to Philadelphia,” Barnes lashed out at “socialites who have little interest in, and much less knowledge of, either what constitutes a work of art or an intelligent method of making the Museum’s resources fruitful educationally.”⁴³² In the end, perhaps Barnes’ evaluation of the public for his Foundation can be summed up in his own words, “Anybody serious can link up with us—but nobody is rich enough or prominent enough to get in with us on those qualities.”⁴³³

At the opening ceremony of the Barnes Foundation, March 19, 1925, Dewey’s address dealt with the cause of education. In the preface to *The Art in Painting* from that same year, Barnes claimed that his method “offers something basically objective to replace the sentimentalism, the antiquarianism, sheltered under the cloak of academic prestige, which make futile the present courses in art in universities and colleges generally.”⁴³⁴ From the beginning Barnes planned to work with area colleges and universities.⁴³⁵ He wrote to Edgar Singer of the Philosophy Department at the University of Pennsylvania, “The purpose of the foundation was to serve as a bridge between fellows like yourself, Dewey, Santayana, Russell, etc. and the well-meaning, well-endowed human beings who have never take you seriously.”⁴³⁶ It is not widely reported that he was successful in running courses in cooperation with Penn for a time in the academic years of 1924 and 1925. Laurence Buermeier was hired to teach courses on

⁴³² Albert C. Barnes, Pamphlet: “A Disgrace to Philadelphia,” (Friends of Art and Education, January 3, 1938) Presidents’ Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. Barnes Foundation Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴³³ George E. Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice: John Dewey And Democracy* (London: Routledge 2016) 122.

⁴³⁴ Barnes, *Art in Painting*, preface to the first edition.

⁴³⁵ Albert C. Barnes, “The Barnes Foundation,” *New Republic* (March 14, 1923): 65.

⁴³⁶ Quoted in Meyers, *Art, Education*, 82. Barnes to Edgar A. Singer, January 25, 1925. Josiah H. Penniman Administration Records.

Modern art, lectures were held at Penn, and students had access to the Barnes galleries for close study of the objects.⁴³⁷ Barnes also courted the Philadelphia public schools, but the Director of Arts Education at Philadelphia public schools, Theodore Dillaway, was against the teaching of modern art to school children and opposed any such relationship. This turned into a decisive public battle that may have finally doomed his efforts with the University of Pennsylvania. Barnes published an article in the first volume of the *Journal of the Barnes Foundation*, “The Shame in the Public School of Philadelphia,” which attacked Dillaway and other teachers, calling the existing educational methods as obsolete. This was troubling to those at Penn who were already reconsidering the partnership.⁴³⁸

The Barnes Collection: Future Publics

As with Johnson, there are two historical periods to consider, the first involves the public as mapped out in advance of the establishment of the Barnes Foundation, and the second involves the publics that arrived later. The Barnes Foundation also underwent two major disruptions, changes that followed the unexpected death of Barnes in 1951, and the chain of events set off by the death of the last original trustee, Violette de Mazia, in 1986, which would lead to the relocation of the Collection to Center City Philadelphia.

After Barnes’ death in 1951, his wife Laura ran the Foundation’s arboretum and left management of the art collection to Barnes’ protégée, de Mazia. At that time private citizens made numerous challenges to the tax exemption status of a public institution that

⁴³⁷ Masamichi Ueno, *Democratic Education and the Public Sphere: Towards John Dewey’s Theory of Aesthetic Experience* (London: Routledge, 2016), 113-115.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

kept the public out. While the details of tax law can be arcane, the thrust of the objection was one of access, and was summed in up rhetoric by art historian, H. W. Janson, in one of many letters to the editor reprinted in *Art News* based on an article dealing with the controversy over the future of the Barnes after his death.

The ownership of important works of art as a public trust...implies the obligation to provide maximum access to these works. The Foundation's insistence that it has the right arbitrarily to determine who may or may not see its collection, denies to these works of art their most vital function as great cultural documents: it prevents them from achieving their full impact upon the consciousness of our time. The exile of the masterpieces in the Barnes Foundation is nobly a shade less complete than that of the Cezanne's and Matisses in the Moscow Museum of Western Art.⁴³⁹

Bombastically, Janson compares Barnes to Stalin and his attempt to control what should be shared cultural treasures. However, this was not Russia and the Trustees of the Foundation were judged at that time to still be within their legal rights to restrict access. There is a strong moral argument made regarding the responsibility of the keepers of cultural treasures. It may be true that Janson's critique is a default position for many Americans even today, who tend to support the American noblesse oblige model, in which elites have a responsibility to invest in art and share it with the general public.

The first cases contesting the right to access the Collection had actually been waged in the 1930s, when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld Barnes Foundation's tax-exempt status. Barnes was emboldened by this ruling and was quoted in *Art Digest* castigating "The complaints of the sentimentalists, the idle rich and the socially conspicuous," confirming, "That our gallery is not a place for them to add another thrill to their lives."⁴⁴⁰ Barnes' position brackets off those he is clearly against, but does not

⁴³⁹ H W. Janson, "Communications on the Barnes Suit," *ARTnews* 51, 3 (1952): 10.

⁴⁴⁰ "Barnes Explains why the Barnes Foundation has never been opened to the

acknowledge that a large percentage of the general public might also desire to visit. And while he was ready to offer admission to those whose interest in art could pass his purity test, his courses by his own admission were all filled with a long waiting list, which translated to only two hundred or so students a year able to attend.⁴⁴¹

Less than a year after his death, in 1952, a similar challenge to open the galleries to the public was dismissed in the courts. Yet another attempt was made in 1958, which was initially thrown out by the court ruling that as an educational institution the Barnes Foundation did not have to provide public access, but the Pennsylvania Supreme Court subsequently overturned it. So the Barnes opened to the public in March 1960, with limited hours on Fridays and Saturday.⁴⁴² This amounts to the first major shift in publics for the Foundation. Despite the numbers allowed to visit were still relatively few compared to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, non-students were now in the galleries two days a week. While there were still no photos allowed or books published, interested groups formed around the study and appreciation of the paintings. However, they brought with them a set of expectations and skills honed in art museums, and bereft of the Barnes' method, would be pushed to actively view the ensembles in order to establish understandings between the works. The ritualized "one-at-a-time approach" they may have internalized would fall short in galleries that offered little in the way of narrative or taxonomic structure.

While this was a partial victory for those citizens concerned with fairness in tax policy, it did not fully address Janson's moral charge related to control of the collection,

Public" *Art Digest* 12:13, March 15, 1938.

⁴⁴¹ Stanley Meisler, "Say What They Say, the Feisty Doctor Had an Artful Eye," *Smithsonian* v. 24, no. 2 (May, 1993): 96-108.

⁴⁴² Meyers, *Art, Education*, 299.

which would come to the fore at the time of the second shift with the death of Violette de Mazia in 1986. Controversy ensued when it was announced that oversight of the board of trustees of the Foundation had been left to Lincoln University, a small, historically African-American college in Chester County Pennsylvania, and not the University of Pennsylvania, or another well-established arts institution. Over the next fifteen years, stewards from Lincoln battled, to the local media's delight, with a broad array of stakeholders over the future of the Barnes Collection. From 1993 to 1995 a selection of works from the collection was permitted to tour the world while renovations were being done on the galleries at Merion. It was also during this time that the works were photographed and the first catalog was printed to coincide with the relocation of the collection in 2012 to downtown Philadelphia. There are many good sources for an overview of the controversy, and it is telling that two of the best are by attorneys, Neil Rudenstine's *House of Barnes*, 2012, and John Anderson's *Art Held Hostage*, 2013. It is beyond the scope of this work to engage with legal issues involving the public trust; suffice to say that Barnes unintentionally invited the type of legal controversy that ensued when he accepted tax-exempt status as a charity that promised public education, and thus gave local government a public interest basis for interceding in the business of the collection.⁴⁴³ In the end I am less interested in determining the legal status of the public, which would be pertinent to any law-abiding, tax-paying citizen of the United States, and more on the art viewing public who through the mere act of visiting and responding to

⁴⁴³ For a legal discussion of heritage law see: J. Nivala, "Droit Patrimoine: The Barnes Collection, the Public Interest, and Protecting our Cultural Inheritance," *Rutgers Law Review* 55 (2003): 477-546.

what they saw were actively shaping the broader discussion on matters of cultural knowledge.

On the occasion of the reopening in Center City, an article in the *New York Review of Books* claimed “There is no doubt about who the big winner is: the general public, which can enjoy unprecedented access to a peerless cultural patrimony long fettered by restrictions imposed by the high-minded, visionary, yet maniacally controlling Albert Coombs Barnes.”⁴⁴⁴ Casting this in terms of winners and losers distracts from the true significance of the move. It is hard to deny that reopening with a standard six-day a week schedule in a tourist city center, where two floors of Barnes’ home have been faithfully recreated nested within a newly built state of the art contemporary structure, complete with café and gift shop, a rotating temporary exhibition space, and all the familiar trappings of a twenty-first century museum, irrevocably altered Barnes’ project from a single collection educational foundation to an interesting and quirky public museum. To stand in favor of this shift is to knowingly sacrifice the collector’s vision in the service of this new mission to reach as many people as possible. We would expect this position to be justified by pointing to booming ticket sales and memberships—common metrics employed to assess the merits of twenty-first century museums—but this may merely highlight the underlying political interest in stimulating tourism and local business.⁴⁴⁵ It does not address the larger issue of what public is being served?

⁴⁴⁴ Martin Filler, “Victory!” *New York Review of Books* vol. 59, no. 12 (July 2012).

⁴⁴⁵ Maxwell Lincoln Anderson, *Metrics of Success in Art Museums* (Los Angeles, Calif: Getty Leadership Institute, 2004), 5. There are three primary indicators of success in the nation’s largest art museums today: the number and marketability of major shows, the number of visitors, and the number of members.

Why Publics Matter

Johnson and Barnes were each in their own way dissatisfied with the narrow public that they perceived was being catered to at existing institutions such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Therefore, in regard to staging their own collections, they were wary of imposing a bourgeois ideal on the working class. They intuited that merely inviting working people into a museum would not change much since those newcomers would have no choice but to conform to the experience within the ritualized space of the museum. Public making involves more than providing access, it necessitates some manner of participation or viewer response. Higonnet believes that the single collection museum is a space conducive to this manner of exchange, since the experience is unique to the viewer amongst a collection of objects held together by the vision of an individual, whereas in a museum curated by professionals the objects are unique and the visitor is part of “unitary body called the public.”⁴⁴⁶ The Philadelphia Museum of Art, as the standard for large public museums, envisions art as a unilateral experience; it defines the public and limits the experience. While the new museology has facilitated inventive and interactive ways for the public to get involved arguably this still holds. Johnson and Barnes designed spaces that attempted to foment spaces defined by discourse.

Johnson’s vision was not clearly articulated, but he seemed to believe that his collection offered all viewers the opportunity to appreciate fine European paintings regardless of their level of cultural capital. This may have been a mistaken notion according to art historian Frank Jewett Mather who while praising the collection worried that the ordinary visitor would require effort to “discover the extraordinary richness of

⁴⁴⁶ Higonnet, *A Museum*, 141.

the display.”⁴⁴⁷ Barnes knew that working people would need a reasonable entry point that did not simply ask them to get up to speed on the history of art. In this way, he diverged from Johnson. Barnes’ situation was also different from his mentor in that he was shaping a public around modern paintings for which there was not yet a stable discourse.

As a means to own up to the rather complicated history of the John G. Johnson Collection, the Philadelphia Museum of Art stages anniversary exhibitions to reintroduce the Collection to the public every few decades. For example, in fall of 2017, the exhibition *Old Masters Now: Celebrating the Johnson Collection* marks the 100th anniversary of his death. The show promises to focus on the care of the works of art over the years and how appreciation of them has evolved. There was a similar exhibition staged in 1991 on the celebration of his 150th birthday. Within the structured environs of the special exhibition spaces, one wonders whether the museum-going public will be able to walk away learning anything of value of Johnson’s sense of judgment, or the breadth of his interests, or the totality of his vision. There will be wall text, audio guides, gallery talks, and catalogs (digital at least) to instruct the audience, but will this cascade of information merely entertain or will it translate to knowledge? The paintings will be front and center, but the way in which they relate will be guided by curatorial decisions in part influenced by factors that serve the needs of the blockbuster model. In other words, what are the most striking or compelling works to make the audience pause at the opening wall, and what will lead them through? Issues related to traffic and how it flows through the spaces are not separable from matters of academic interest. Johnson would be

⁴⁴⁷ Frank Jewett Mather, “John G. Johnson,” *Nation* vol. 104 (April 19, 1917): 468.

disappointed at the amount of celebrity he has attained, but the museum going public wants to get to know the collector.

The Barnes Collection has already signaled that it will continue to transform in its new home. It has announced a \$500,000 endowment gift from a drug company to a program called, “Ensure Art Educational Experiences for Students from Philadelphia School District,” and has circulated a press release promising an expanded education program that introduces new frameworks for art interpretation alongside original methodology. There are music performances, special events weekly, separate rotating exhibition spaces, a gift shop, and complimentary audio guides for the gallery.

Ultimately the two men’s collections would fall under the rubric of the new museology and the increased profit-based management of America’s cultural institutions. Increasing amounts of budgets are spent on promotion and enlisting member/donors. This both helped to create and to foster the culture vultures that leverage the reach of the Internet, especially by way of social media, to drive up attendance at perceived must-see happenings and events. This is not a lament for lost museums; it is a recognition that single collections have been made to adapt to the norms of the cultural marketplace if they are to survive. Johnson had disappeared into the fold of the Philadelphia Museum. Barnes Collection is a stop on every tourist’s bucket list. Perhaps even the Frick one day soon will allow children to enter. The Johnson Collection will have to settle for anniversary parties. The Barnes Collection will reconcile to its fate as the opposite of what was intended. In their original designs, single collections had reoriented discourse on art towards matters of display, cohesiveness, pedagogical intention, educational value, art historical sequence, and individual taste. While many of these concepts linger, in the

aggregate on display in a global museum these concerns yield to the expression of broader cultural values.⁴⁴⁸ The agency of the collector that worked to shape the experience in the galleries becomes reified in the catalog as a matter of historical interest. The viewer normalizes the experience and need not worry about the difference.

The prolonged and well-orchestrated extension of Barnes' agency by way of the Indenture and Charter, were carried on through the efforts of a small cohort of dedicated followers for the second half of the twentieth century. But in the end these practices appeared out of step and anachronistic to new publics, which had been activated by historical circumstance in the interim. These groups came armed with fresh demands on Barnes life's work and their challenges simply reinforced contemporary expectations for arts institutions at the end of the twentieth century, especially regarding key issues for Barnes, around access, education, publication, and profitability. These imagined publics, so described in the language of international studies scholar Benedict Anderson in order to foreground the idea that imagined communities of individuals share a discourse, but may in fact never physically meet, would include: artists, academics, critics, museum educators, art dealers, students, museum members, culture vultures, tourists, trustees, and donors, among others. In an over determined manner, sundry groups evolve over time, establish networks, and shape discourse in a global art world, and in a sense are the art world. As theorist Bruno Latour claims, social relations are always in process and must be performed continuously.

In this light, the Barnes Foundation joined a broader cultural conversation in the 1990s as a genuine outsider. In the years between his death and that of his protégée, once

⁴⁴⁸ Higonnet, *A Museum*, 135. "On the whole private collections express individual impulses, while public museums express cultural values."

nascent groups, who had posed little challenge to Barnes, were now key players. With the Barnes Collection hermetically sealed for the better part of a century, obscured in suburban Philadelphia, these newly well-entrenched publics now viewed Barnes' project with skepticism from vaunted positions of authority. Barnes failed to make friends with those he needed the most. By not creating an academic community, the Foundation failed to achieve a critical edge so essential to academic renewal. He had failed to secure a powerful institutional alliance, until recently with Lincoln University, and as has been pointed out by many, never produced a top academic scholar in any field. His followers lacked a critical discourse in place to combat voices trained at well-established institutions.

Theorist Michael Ward reminds us “museum exhibitions are a form of public discourse.”⁴⁴⁹ Since discourse is dynamic, constantly being made and remade, collectors are thus active, if unintentional, agents in shaping publics by means of assembling works of art, exhibiting their collections, and securing their legacy through display. Collecting is a place that allows us to define the public. At the Johnson House Museum and the Barnes Foundation, these publics were just beginning to form. Today we have a view onto how art-viewing publics have been and continue to be shaped. In response to the blockbuster world of global museums, it is ironic that the world has come back to craving small intimate spaces that take effort and reward persistence.

⁴⁴⁹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002) 72.

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