HISTORICAL PRESERVATION AND THE BARNES FOUNDATION:

AN AMERICAN IDEAL

Robert Zaller

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Each of us experiences the world through his senses as directed by instinct and mediated by culture. It's how we reckon who we are, where we are, and what we can do. It's how we figure out what's out there, and all around us.

Art is a culture's way of doing the same thing for itself. There are many ways in which a culture tests, measures, and constructs the world. Science is an obvious example. But all our tools of measurement and evaluation, and all our means of constructing value, are partial and limited. Chemistry tells us this, and biology that, and physics the other. So do philosophy, psychology, and religion. Only art covers everything, though, because only in art are perception, response, and construction integrated. Only in art do we *immediately* grasp the world, and make it ours. It's been a great delusion of traditional art theory to say that art "represents" the world. It actually makes it: not out of nothing, of course, but out of what we see and feel, and, in the visual arts, what we can render by means of objective possibilities such as line, form, volume, and color. This is as exactly true of the most abstract art as it is of *trompe d'oeil* painting, in which the artist tries to persuade us that we are not seeing a picture but an actual thing itself.

Art is in this sense the most social activity there is; the most comprehensive; and the most vital. Great civilizations have existed that never developed the wheel, but we know of no culture, no matter how savage or far removed from us in time, that has not defined itself through

art. Art is not only *uniquely prevalent*, though; it is also *universal*. Ancient science means nothing except to academic specialists; we no longer study the formulas for alchemy--except, of course, on the stock market--and we do not care that we have forgotten them. But the art of the Lascaux caves, thirty thousand years old, is still important to us; it still speaks to us, and if we cannot decipher everything it was meant to say, it moves us in part for just that reason: it is an enigma that we still long to understand, even as it is an aesthetic triumph we can still fully appreciate. Only art has this quality: it is the one human thing that we can appreciate, even at a glance, across many millennia. It is the one thing about us that is always fresh, and in a sense provisional. It is for that reason also the one thing about us that is truly immortal.

Art has served many purposes. It begins, obviously, with an individual, the artist. For many years in our culture, however, this was not an important fact. We don't know the names of the men who designed and executed the medieval cathedrals, and we know only a relative handful of Greek and Roman artists. When artists started signing their works, we began to leave the communal world of the Middle Ages and to enter the modern marketplace, where the artist who sold his wares had to stamp and identify them as his product. Thus was the "artist" born in our modern sense of the world, not as an anonymous maker but as a public figure.

The market made for a reciprocal figure on the other end: the consumer. You don't have to buy art in order to consume it; that is, to experience it as personally and uniquely one's own. We all have favorite works of art that hang in galleries and museums. They're too big, or too expensive, to hang over our mantelpieces, but they're in a place we can reach whenever we need to at the expense only of some time and money.

For most of us, then, our relationship with works of art is not simply that of a consumer to a thing exclusively acquired and personally enjoyed. The *Mona Lisa* has as many owners as it has people who love it. And art in a sense is not consumable at all, because, as I have suggested, it is also immortal. If I were able to buy a Picasso, it would be absurd to say in any serious sense that it ceases to belong to Picasso and now belongs to me. What I can establish, whether I buy or simply look, is a relationship with the work of art and its maker, a relationship in which the artist will always have the upper hand.

When we think about art in a democracy, we think about how artists and their publics interact. In a democracy, there is no single public, but a wide range of freely chosen activities, and so, as such, no single, prescriptive meaning to a given work of art. In the Middle Ages, people were expected to react to a picture of the Madonna in certain ways; they were taught to react in these ways; and we may presume that, for the most part, they did so. But "meaning" is not given in a society that is pluralistic, and where art has ceased to be subservient to particular social functions. The individual artist speaks to the individual art-lover, and no two such relations are identical.

If we recall the observation we made earlier that art is our collective way of making sense of the world, then the relation between the artist and the individual art-lover may also be regarded as a kind of seed in the world from which mutual exploration and understanding may grow. If I stand alone before a work of art, I bring to it whatever knowledge, capacity, and insight I can muster. If I stand beside another person, we can share our impressions: "Look at this! Do you see that?" If a third person joins us, we are a group, and we can not just exchange

views but settle down to study. If we are sensitive observers and the work of art before us is a great one, our conversation can be inexhaustible.

Dr. Albert Barnes, America's greatest art collector, and John Dewey, our foremost educational philosopher, saw in such a grouping a paradigm for democracy itself. Democracy is sometimes a clash of private interests, but it is also a means for creating common ones. The world of democracy is never fixed and settled; it is the mansion we are always constructing, the world we create in common. The question is always, On what terms shall we create this world? Our private interests frequently get in the way here, but the experience of art is privileged in this respect: there are no winners and losers in front of a work of art, but only the work of shared understanding in which we may all be gainers.

If we look at it from this point of view, then there is no better place for democratic citizens to congregate than in an art gallery. Barnes and Dewey thought so. Now, the relationship between art and democracy is not obvious. For many centuries, art was at the service of religion, and even more narrowly of priestly castes; it was also, in later ages, a self-gratifying mirror for the aristocracy. If it always found ways to outwit its various masters--to find the ways in which it can speak to us today--it was generally regarded as a subordinate activity: the artist, that is, was a kind of artisan. It may, indeed, be possible to overvalue art, but it is certainly possible to undervalue it; and that has in large part been its history. Only very recent centuries, perhaps only the last two or so, have begun to give art its genuine due. In doing so, we have sometimes gone too far. art is not itself a religion, or a substitute for one; nor are artists high priests. The modesty of art--I say not its limits, but its modesty--requires us to refuse

this. Art as a religion, or the artist as a priest, is just another form of imposition. And the goal of a democracy is liberation.

How is art related to liberation? Dewey asks us to consider the distinction between activities "which are charged with intrinsic significance" from those which are merely instrumental. The "merely instrumental," he says, is "drudgery." What he means by drudgery is the economic compulsion to which most people in his day were condemned, and to which they are still condemned in ours:

> Innumerable commodities which are manufactured by the [so-called] 'useful arts' are only apparently and superficially useful; their employment results not in satisfaction of intelligent desire, but in confusion and extravagance, bought at the price of a narrowed and embittered experience. There can be no true understanding of either practice or aesthetic appreciation while practice is in large measure slavery, and while 'aesthetic appreciation' is merely one of the forms of distraction by which intervals of respite from slavery are whiled away.[1]

What does Dewey mean here? He is suggesting that we live in a world of junk, and that those condemned both to produce and to consume it are equally the victims of what he calls "a narrowed and embittered experience." Among the results of this is that one of the noblest experiences we can have, the genuine experience of art and the worlds it can reveal to us and stimulate in us, is debased into something called 'art appreciation,' which is the reverse of experience itself, a mere "distraction" from what he provocatively calls our "slavery."

These are strong words, but they are even truer now than when they were written. We have only to think of what passes for art education in our world, or art experience in those conveyer-belt emporiums we call museums, where crowds of workweek prisoners are moved on Sundays past what the canned voices in their ears assure them is 'great art.' Such crowds really are consumers, but what they consume is a *commodity*--art as trade and, literally, as traffic--which completely masks the work of art that may be physically in front of them. It's hard to imagine anything more culturally tragic. It is as if a starving man were set in front of a feast, but condemned to see only ashes instead.

These, too, might seem strong words, but I am prepared to stand by them. When I see museum-goers plugged into their earphones, I see a new race of what Dewey called "slaves." The voice in the earphone that tells them what to see--exactly like slaves all receiving the same command at once--keeps them from seeing anything for themselves at all.

This is the very opposite of the democratic vision of art that Barnes and Dewey shared.

Let us see what Dr. Barnes himself has to say about this subject. The experience of art, he writes, "involves effort and entails fatigue; work is done, [and] the process is active and not passive."[2] In other words, the spectator of art, if he is to have a genuine experience of art and the satisfactions it can offer, must put his own work into it. It must be *his* work of art in the sense of the personal relationship he enters into with the artist who created it; it must be one man (or woman) speaking to another. This is true even if he (or she) is with a group of others, each of whom will have an individual perspective of his or her own. The only requirement is the willingness to look for oneself.

We spoke awhile ago of “interests” as constitutive of a democracy, public as well as private ones. It is significant that Barnes himself takes up this term in his essay on “The Roots of Art”:

The word most important at this point is ‘interest.’ ‘Interest’ implies concern, not with ourselves, but with objective things, and concern which is permanent. A real interest is an identification of ourselves with something which is real independently of us . . . . Its essential characteristic is that it induces him who has it to take pains, to make efforts, and so to order his activities that the object of his interest takes form in his mind and becomes the propelling force of his activities.[3]

Barnes has in mind the way we engage ourselves in the experience of art, but what he says has obvious implications for all other kinds of activities too. To form an interest is to take stock of the world and be able to grapple with it creatively. Such interests may be private ones, as hobbies are; but when they involve things that are, as Barnes says, “objective” and “real independently of us”--that is, aspects of the world we concretely share--they become not isolating but unifying. If we take this world in its social sense, then a society of equal sharers is, in fact, what we mean by “democracy.”

Let us see where Barnes and Dewey are trying to lead us. Let’s imagine in an art class, such a class as we might find in the Barnes Foundation itself. A group of students are led by a teacher, who functions as a guide. The teacher asks the students what they see in a given work

of art, and how it relates to the works adjacent to it. The work is proposed to the students as a common world--an object with a certain aesthetic value upon which a general determination may be made, although each student will continue to see the work in his or her own way within any mode of agreement. In this way what one may call a *common interest* is constructed. The students share a perception about what is in front of them in terms of line, form, volume, and color, and the way in which these elements create pictorial harmonies and disharmonies, balances and imbalances, resolutions and irresolutions. In this way, they come to experience the dynamic tensions of the work. But each of them, having done his or her own work, experiences the work of art in a qualitatively different way. There is both general agreement and individual difference, individual distinction. The work of art, for the group, is both in the agreement and the difference; it is a shared world, that is, to which everyone has made a contribution and which no single experience or point of view can define.

If we take the work of art as symbolizing the horizon of democracy itself--a world of common value constructed by common labor but also the *distinctive* possession of each participant, and hence continually in flux and with its creative potential never finally exhausted--then we can see what Barnes and Dewey meant by suggesting that art education could be a training ground for democracy, and an actual experience of it. In a time when many people felt that fine art was something for snobs and swells, Barnes and Dewey argued, courageously and exactingly, that it was *most* of all for those whom Barnes called the "toilers," their possession and their birthright, and the very school of their democracy. This, very simply stated, was the Barnes ideal. It was a quintessentially American ideal. It could have sprung from no other soil

but ours, and represented no other faith and aspiration but ours. It was, and is, a grand and epic vision.

Albert Barnes was not the only significant collector in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America. J. P. Morgan and Henry Clay Frick amassed great collections, largely of old masters. Barnes differed, however, from the magnates of the Gilded Age who had made their money off sweated labor and regarded fine art as an ornament of wealth and power. Barnes' own fortune derived from Argyrol, a protein-based silver nitrate solution used to treat eye diseases, particularly among infants. The man who wanted to teach his fellow citizens to see in fact rescued the sight of many thousands of children.

When Barnes opened a factory to produce Argyrol in West Philadelphia, he hired a dozen African-Americans, an unheard-of gesture at a time when black males were employed almost exclusively as menials. From the beginning, indeed, Barnes regarded his chemical laboratories as a laboratory of democracy as well. Worker initiative was encouraged: "The business never had a boss," he later said, "and never needed one." But Barnes, himself the son of working-class parents, wanted not merely contented and productive workers, but educated ones. He introduced seminars in which his employees read such works as Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and William James' *Principles of Psychology*. Barnes' workers put in a standard eight-hour day, but only six of those hours were devoted to producing Argyrol. The other two were spent in reading and discussion groups, time for which full compensation was paid. There wasn't another capitalist in America like Albert C. Barnes.

Barnes had also begun to take an interest in art, partly under the influence of his attorney,

John G. Johnson, himself a notable collector whose paintings were later acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art under circumstances that resemble those now surrounding the Barnes Foundation, and which, contrary to the assurances that their unity and identity would be maintained, subsequently disappeared into the general collection. Barnes was nothing if not persistent in pursuing the art that struck his fancy, and the story is told of him chasing Gertrude Stein around her Paris apartment, not because of Ms. Stein's personal charms but in quest of a Picasso she owned. By 1914, the magazine *Arts and Decoration* noted that the Barnes collection "was the most consistently modern . . . in America" (Meyers, 36).[4] With the founding of the Museum of Modern Art still fifteen years away, Barnes had assembled, in fact, the first important modern art collection in America, if not the world, and he was soon to become perhaps the most important patron of it as well. Only the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow could rival it, and, like Pavel Tretyakov, Barnes was already looking forward to the day when he would bequeathe it to his native city, Philadelphia.

Barnes' interest in African art may have grown out of his childhood exposure to revival meetings where black preachers and choruses predominated, and it was certainly informed both by his sensitivity to the plight of African-Americans--virtually unique in a man of his time, place, and culture--and by the obvious influence of tribal art on the work of Picasso, Matisse, and other moderns. "What the Negro has achieved," Barnes wrote in 1925, the year the Barnes Foundation opened its doors, "is of tremendous civilizing value . . . . it is incredible that we should not offer the consideration which we have consistently denied to him" (134).[5] African-Americans themselves responded with something like amazement to Barnes, this self-made Main

Line businessman who displayed not an ounce of prejudice or social reserve, and who seemed boundlessly enthusiastic about black culture and the black prospect in America. Charles S. Johnson of the National Urban League wrote him, "How you got in ahead of most of the rest of the world in appreciating and collecting . . . [African sculpture] is incomprehensible" (137).[6] Barnes knew almost all the major figures of the Harlem Renaissance, and was, indeed, a significant party to it. Who else could, or would, have said this is in 1925:

Today [the Negro] has not yet found a place of equality in the social, educational or industrial world of the white man. But he has the same singing soul as the ancestors who created the single form of great art that America can claim as her own. . . . Through the compelling powers of his poetry and music the American Negro is revealing to the rest of the world the essential oneness of all human beings. . . . He has taught us to respect the sheer manly greatness of the fiber which has kept his inward light burning with an effulgence that shines through the darkness in which we have tried to keep him. . . . He may consent to form a working alliance with us for the development of a richer American civilization to which he will contribute his full share. (142)[7]

Albert Barnes' greatness of soul is nowhere more evident than in these lines. He was never just another rich collector, and certainly not a man who meant to lock his treasures up for the contemplation of a few. He was a man with as full and capacious a view of democracy as Jefferson or Lincoln, and in some respects even more, because he did not believe that democracy could flourish until it incorporated its most despised members, and that it was precisely those

members who were most essential to it. Jefferson kept slaves and we excuse him for it, at least in part; Lincoln believed that the slaves he freed would never be accepted in America, and that their best fortune would be to return to Africa. Albert Barnes, living in a time when lynch law still governed race relations in much of the country, affirmed that none of us would be truly free or truly whole until the black man was accepted as a brother and equal, and even a paragon. Albert Barnes said that it was actually up to the black man to "consent" to join those who had persecuted him.

From the beginning, then, the Barnes Foundation was conceived not only as a source of aesthetic enlightenment and pleasure but as a means of achieving social justice. In the words of John Dewey, Barnes' close friend and collaborator, "I believe that education is the fundamental method of social change. . . . Education thus conceived marks the most perfect and intimate union of science and art conceivable in human experience."[8] Science and *art*: for Barnes himself had already conceived his collection as an aesthetic unity whose subject was experience in its totality, and whose systematic study was not only an apprenticeship in democracy but its concrete realization. In a Barnes study group, class distinctions did not matter, but only the willingness to investigate a common subject matter, and, by shared insight, to build common perception and understanding. This was democracy in action, and a preparation for democratic action in the wider world. As Barnes himself, a self-taught man who acknowledged himself a life-long learner and traveled weekly to New York to place himself at the feet of the famous Professor Dewey--Dewey later said that Barnes taught him more than he ever learned from him--so any man, of any station, might profit from the free exchange stimulated by great art, and the

enduring principles which, as Barnes believed, underlay it. Art revealed the common nature of our experience; exposed the common structure of our perception; and thus served as a common source of value.

Barnes excluded no one from his classes, and, to make them available to all, precluded the charging of tuition. (This is no longer the case; tuition is now $1000 per class, a sum that for all practicable purposes does exclude the poor workman--twenty-five per cent of Philadelphia's current population--whom Barnes most wished to benefit.) There was another aspect to the Barnes "experiment" (as he himself called it) that made it a laboratory for democracy. Democracy may be the hope of a just world, but it must plant itself in the soil of an unjust one. The matter of democracy in the workaday world is the clash of unequal interests, in which one man's gain may well be another's loss, and almost no political action is either disinterested or unambiguously constitutive of a common interest. But aesthetic experience is, by definition, a common interest. We do not lose, but only gain, in sharing it. It is, in this sense, an *ideal* experience, which is only heightened by being shared, and, as Barnes devised it, heightened *in* being shared, since it is precisely the experience of others that refines and amplifies our own.

This does not mean that art is exempt from the marketplace. Even before World War I, when you could ride the trolley for a nickel, a Cezanne could fetch up to $30,000. Barnes drove as hard a bargain as the next man in acquiring his collection. Once it was up, though, he charged nothing to see it and nothing to study it; the cost was fully capitalized. Nor would his works ever acquire market value again. The collection was closed as of his death,[9] and no work in the permanent gallery--the teaching laboratory itself--was ever to be sold, loaned, or reproduced for

any commercial purpose. If the monetary value of a commodity lies entirely in its capacity to be exchanged, to be bought and sold, then the market value of the Albert Barnes collection was fixed at zero. Its aesthetic value was, of course, untouched, and its social value, its ability to challenge, instruct, and delight, was enhanced.

A reciprocally democratic relationship was thereby established between the art objects on the gallery walls and the classes that studied them. The objects themselves, stripped of their exchange value, their potential price on the open market, presented themselves only in terms of their intrinsic value as arrangements of line, form, volume, and color. The students, likewise, checked their income levels at the door, since admission was free. Whether you were a prince or a pauper, the only thing that mattered was the level of your attention and the quality of your insight, your ability to contribute to the general discussion.

Barnes further democratized his gallery classrooms by the manner in which he hung their objects, and which he likewise insisted should remain fixed (although not static). No single painting or other object existed by and for itself, but each was arranged in relation to its neighbors on the wall in order to suggest their dynamic symmetry--the way in which one composition might play off another, accenting common values as well as idiosyncratic differences. A Barnes gallery wall is, in effect, a composition in itself, as well as a conversation among the individual works of art that comprise it, a conversation kept lively by the diversity of the objects themselves. It is like a wonderful party in which people of every walk of life rub elbows without the need to assert status or priority. And this, too, reflects the democracy of the class study itself, in which all willing to contribute and learn are welcome.

Those of you who were present at Derek Gillman's stimulating talk a month ago will recall that he presented slides of individual works of art from the collection on white matt backgrounds. They looked splendid in their colors, while the black and white photographs of the gallery themselves, squeezed awkwardly into elongated frames, seemed rather dingy, fussy, and crowded by comparison. What Derek was showing you was a *masterpiece*, that is, a picture that announces its importance and demands that you offer the appropriate tokens of admiration and respect, whether you actually like the thing or not. Such a picture almost carries its own price tag with it. We all remember the recent fuss about "saving" Thomas Eakins' signature painting, *The Gross Clinic*, for Philadelphia. *The Gross Clinic* had hung in an obscure corner of Thomas Jefferson Hospital for nearly 130 years without attracting the attention of more than a handful of art lovers and scholars. Perhaps five hundred people a year saw it: one or two a day. Most people had no idea the painting existed, let alone that it was a vital part of Philadelphia's "heritage." But when a rich purchaser appeared to offer $68 million for it, it immediately acquired immense value--*market* value. Suddenly, keeping *The Gross Clinic* in Philadelphia became as important as preventing a major sports franchise from leaving town. Obscured in all this was the fact that less money was, and is, required to keep the literally hundreds of works by Cezanne, Renoir, Picasso, and Matisse that adorn the Barnes in their historic home in Merion, not to mention the work of dozens of other masters, than to "save" a single Eakins. Unfortunately, no one will be able to see *The Gross Clinic* in strictly aesthetic terms again. It's now the "masterpiece" that cost Philadelphia $68 million to save--including the sale of another fine Eakins, *The Cellist*, which left Derek's old institution, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine

Arts, one painting poorer, and entailed bank loans that will drive the final cost up even higher.[10] And why is *The Gross Clinic* a masterpiece, a fact that almost no one knew a couple of years ago but which now no one can deny? Why, because it cost $68 million. Only, we no longer see *The Gross Clinic* for the intrinsic value it possesses. We see the price tag, and bow before Mammon.

This is the modern art market in action. It is just what Albert Barnes sought to protect his own collection from. The only values Barnes wanted us to see in his gallery were aesthetic and educative. The ultimate value he strove for was democratic, the potential of great art to help produce worthy citizens.

The way Barnes and Dewey put together art, education, and politics is not intuitive or obvious. It was bold, imaginative, and speculative. It went far beyond the conventional curricula of so-called art appreciation, which, then and now, marginalizes the transformative potential of art by putting it on a pedestal where we are invited to admire great creators and their works, but consider them as mere adornments of life instead of a central means of human perception. Barnes and Dewey realized that if we understand art as not only a powerful and essential way of grasping the world but as a uniquely comprehensive one, it is really the foundation of education itself, as education is of citizenship. It is also the foundation of *adult* education, because, whereas the physical sciences cannot be approached without an extensive training that normally begins in grade school, the immediate, sensuous appeal of art enables even an untutored adult to experience and profit from it at once, even if the proper understanding of a great work of art is the inexhaustible task of a lifetime.

A sympathetic scholar has described the Barnes Foundation as "the temple in Merion"[11] I

think that is an error. A temple is a place of worship, normally set apart. Barnes, the trained chemist, saw it rather as a laboratory, not for initiates but, as he expressed it, for "men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores and similar places."[12] Not belief, but labor was the only ticket of admission to the Barnes; not dogma, but free inquiry was its object. The success of his experiment is in the thousands of Barnes students, some of them here tonight, who have testified to the transformative effects of the Barnes curriculum, and are even now in court to fight for his legacy.

Late in life, Barnes made the acquaintance of Horace Mann Bond, a distinguished African-American scholar and president of neighboring Lincoln University, America's oldest black institution of higher learning. The two men struck up a fast friendship, and Barnes was a generous patron. Shortly before his death, Barnes decided to entrust the future of the Foundation to Lincoln, authorizing it to nominate four of the five trustees who would eventually govern it. It was his last experiment, the culminating act of a lifetime's investment in African-American welfare. In the nearly one hunded year history of Lincoln University to that date, Albert Barnes was its first white benefactor.

One thing should now be clear about the Barnes Foundation. It is not a public museum, but an educational institution devoted to the study of art and chartered as such. I make this point because the Barnes is so frequently referred to as a "museum." This is not simply an idle mistake, but the result of a systematic effort to denigrate and undermine its educational mission and to characterize it as a public entity whose tax-exempt status demands maximum access by the general public. This was the gravamen of a suit brought against it in 1952, by *The*

Philadelphia Inquirer, then owned by Walter Annenberg and a bitter enemy of Barnes. In the nearly sixty years since, *The Inquirer* has never deviated from its misrepresentation of the Barnes Foundation. In its most recent editorial on the Barnes, little over a week ago, it was still calling it a "museum."[13]

A museum is a place of public resort, whose educational activities, if any, are ancillary to its function as an exhibition hall. It is also an emporium; it buys and sells art, the polite term for the latter activity being 'deaccessioning.' Additionally, it hosts and lends to traveling exhibitions. All of these activities are expressly prohibited in the Barnes' Indenture of Trust. They are precisely what the so-called philanthropic interests that are trying to move the Barnes downtown have in mind for it.

Albert Barnes recognized the general public interest in his collection, and provided that it be opened to the public on Sundays. But systematic study of it was its *raison d'etre*. The Court of Common Pleas rejected *The Inquirer's* suit, and the State Supreme Court upheld the decision on appeal. A new suit, however, again spearheaded by *The Inquirer*, won favor, and compelled the Barnes to open its doors to a wider public in 1961. This suit, like the original one, was aggressively supported by the Attorney General's Office, which has the legal responsibility of enforcing and protecting trusts. Why an Office charged to protect a trust should, over a period of more than half a century and up to this very moment, strive with might and main to subvert and overturn it, is one of the more curious questions of our saga. Maybe you can invite Tom Corbett to come here one of these days and explain it.[14]

To make a museum of the Barnes means to destroy it as an educational institution, and

thereby to destroy the experiment in democracy that, to the irritation of moneyed interests from Barnes' own time till now, it still represents. In its prime, the Barnes enrolled hundreds of students a year, but when the so-called "masterpieces" of its collection--that word again--were sent on a needless and hazardous world tour in 1993-95, its doors were shuttered, and its educational program suspended.[15] It has since been allowed to dwindle to the vanishing point, and, although the courts still pay lip service to maintaining it, it will clearly be an impediment to the brave new world of mass-market tourism envisioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts and its fellow power brokers.

It is one of the great ironies of this story that billionaire interests from Walter Annenberg to Raymond Perelman should represent their efforts to destroy the Barnes as a populist insurgency against the snobbish 'elitism' supposedly represented by Albert Barnes. The rich have always regarded art as the servant of their own luxury, to do with as they wish. When the Barnes [collection] reopened after the world tour, Mr. Perelman remarked at a reception to Ed Rendell, then Mayor of Philadelphia, that "the Barnes is too good for Merion. We're going to bring it to Philadelphia." Mr. Rendell has been obliging Mr. Perelman and his cohorts ever since. So has the Pennsylvania State Legislature, which passed a $100 million allocation to move the Barnes at a time when its Director was publicly on record as saying it had neither the desire nor the intention to move.[16]

Let's think a minute about Mr. Perelman's remark and what it means. The Barnes is too good for *Montgomery County*. It's too good for all of us. Democracy, likewise, has always been too good for the people, which is why moneyed interests have always tried to keep it from

becoming a practical reality. Albert Barnes dreamed otherwise. He took his fortune and devoted it to popular empowerment. The force of his ideal is as real and as threatening to the rich and powerful as it has ever been, which is why they have been so unrelenting in trying to destroy it.

If we are to give Dr. Barnes his due, we should pay him the kind of honor we do to Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Martin Luther King. Horace Mann Bond eulogized him as "a friend to all the dispossessed of the world"[17] We would not, I think, dream of bringing the contents of Jefferson's Monticello to Washington because it would be more convenient to tourists in Washington and spare them a ride into the country. The uniqueness of what Albert Barnes created, the inestimable value of the greatest collection of art ever assembled by a single individual in America, the beauty of the building that houses it and the garden and arboretum that make with it a seamless whole, and, above all, the spirit of democracy it embodies, demands our honor. Bill Bolger will more fully describe the characteristics that have made the Barnes eligible for National Landmark status, a status that should have been bestowed on it long ago. Let me simply say that it represents the best of us as a nation, the best of our hopes and dreams, and that the Lower Merion Conservancy, as the only body in Montgomery County directly concerned with historic preservation, has a vital role to play in upholding it.

Let's think of the Barnes as a treasure, but not as a shrine. Let's think of it as a working laboratory of our democracy. In fighting to preserve it, we fight not only for one man's legacy, but for our own birthright.

Endnotes

1. John Dewey, Albert C. Barnes, et al., *Art and Education* ([Merion, PA]): Barnes Foundation Press, 1929), 5-6.
2. Ibid., xx.
3. Ibid., 18.
4. Mary Ann Meyers, *Art, Education, and African-American Culture: Albert Barnes and the Science of Philanthropy* (New Brunswick, N. J. and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 36.
5. Ibid., 134.
6. Ibid., 137.
7. Ibid., 142.
8. John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897) in Thomas M. Alexander and Larry A. Hickman, eds., *The Essential Dewey, Volume I: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 234.
9. By-Laws of the Barnes Foundation, Article 9, Section 9 (dated April 30, 1946). The By-Laws and the Indenture of Trust are printed in Gilbert M. Cantor, *The Barnes Foundation: Reality Versus Myth* (Philadelphia: Consolidated Drake Press, 1963; 2d ed., revised, 1974), and are available online at barnesfriends.org.
10. The coverage of *The Gross Clinic* sale was most complete in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, especially in November-December 2006; see also the articles by Carol Vogel and Kathryn Shattuck in *The New York Times*, December 15, 19, 2006. The sale of *The*

Cellist was announced on February 1, 2007; see the subsequent commentary by Edward J. Sozanski in *The Inquirer* on February 11.

11. Meyers, op. cit., 65.
12. By-laws of the Barnes Foundation (April 30, 1946).
13. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 3, 2007.
14. For the legal history of the Barnes Foundation, see Cantor, op. cit.; Meyers, op. cit.; and John Anderson, *Art Held Hostage: The Battle Over the Barnes Foundation* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2003). See also the points raised in my "Open Letter to Tom Corbett," *Main Lines Times*, October 18, 2007, 14-15, which remain unanswered.
15. Anderson, 98, 107-108, 111-118, 122-123; Meyers, 327-337.
16. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 22, 2005.
17. Meyers, 294.