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The Art of Keeping Art Together: On Collectors' Museums and Their Preservation

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# The art of keeping art together

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## *On collectors' museums and their preservation*

DARIO GAMBONI

### **Gathering, displaying, scattering**

At his death in 1896, Edmond de Goncourt left the following testament (fig. 1): "My will is that my drawings, my prints, my bibelots, my books, in a word the art objects that made the happiness of my life, be not coldly entombed in a museum and meet the stupid gaze of indifferent passers-by, and I request that they all be auctioned and scattered, so that the pleasure I found in acquiring each of them be given again, for each of them, to an heir to my taste."<sup>1</sup> The denigration of museums as "cold graves" stood in a tradition going back to the late eighteenth century, and in particular to Quatremère de Quincy's condemnation of the decontextualization of artworks.<sup>2</sup> To their alleged coldness and lifelessness, de Goncourt opposed the warm world of the private collection, born of passion and of the individual choice of individual objects, producing happiness and life itself. For him, this life-giving quality did not inhere in any of the objects he had collected, or in their assemblage or installation; on the contrary, in order to preserve this quality and to enable the objects to disseminate further pleasure, the collection had to be destroyed as such, and its constitutive elements to be scattered again. The hoped-for "heirs" of de Goncourt, a programmatic bachelor, would not inherit his collection but reenact his collector's activity: process, not product would be passed on to a new generation.

Other collectors obey another impulse, weigh and judge things differently, and take the opposite decision: They create collectors' museums.<sup>3</sup> For them, it is the

dispersal of the objects they have cherished that equates with entropy and death, and they trust the capacity of their collection to bring to its visitors a pleasure of a different kind, perhaps, but of no inferior value. These museums aim at keeping together, during and beyond their creators' life, an assemblage of objects that represents them for present and future generations. Keeping art together, fighting entropy, and going through time are no easy tasks, however: They require many devices such as wills, endowments, administrators, buildings, curators . . . and the list could grow much longer.

"The art of keeping art together" starts with the art of bringing and showing it together: the art of collecting and the art of display. The former is indispensable while the latter is not, but the art of collecting often finds in display a form of expression that is crucial to its crystallization into a museum. The reason for this may be that display, or installation, manifests the existence and the necessity of the larger "body" of art that is a collection in the language of art itself, that is, visually and sensitively. Many collectors' museums are thus—or at least were meant to be—not only museums of a given collection, but also museums of a specific display of this collection, enduring presentations of a determined spatial configuration of objects.

An early form of this "eternization" of objectal constellations is the integration of archaeological fragments into the walls of palaces, churches, and gardens. Rome has many examples of this, and the practice was taken over by travelers. At Schloss Glienicke, for instance, between Berlin and Potsdam, Prince Carl von Preussen inserted into the walls of the castle, its enclosed garden, and smaller ad hoc buildings the antique, Byzantine, and medieval architectural fragments, sculptures, and sarcophagi that he shipped back from his numerous trips to Italy and around the

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1. Edmond de Goncourt's testament from 1896, reproduced in *Le Livre et l'Image*, n.s. no. 1 (March 1910):6.

2. See Francis Haskell, "Les musées et leurs ennemis," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 49 (1983):103–106; Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art, suivi de Lettres sur l'enlèvement des ouvrages de l'art antique à Athènes et à Rome* [1815/1836] (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

3. This reflection was prompted by the invitation to convene a symposium on the present and future of collectors' museums for the fiftieth anniversary of the Clark Institute in Williamstown, Mass. It was entitled "Private Realm and Public Space: The Collectors' Museum in

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the Twenty-First Century" and took place September 15–17, 2006. I want to thank Michael Ann Holly and Michael Conforti for this invitation, as well as Mark Ledbury for the organization, and Francesco Pellizzi for proposing to publish Anne Higonnet's, Pascal Griener's, Alan Chong's, and my contributions in this issue of *RES*.

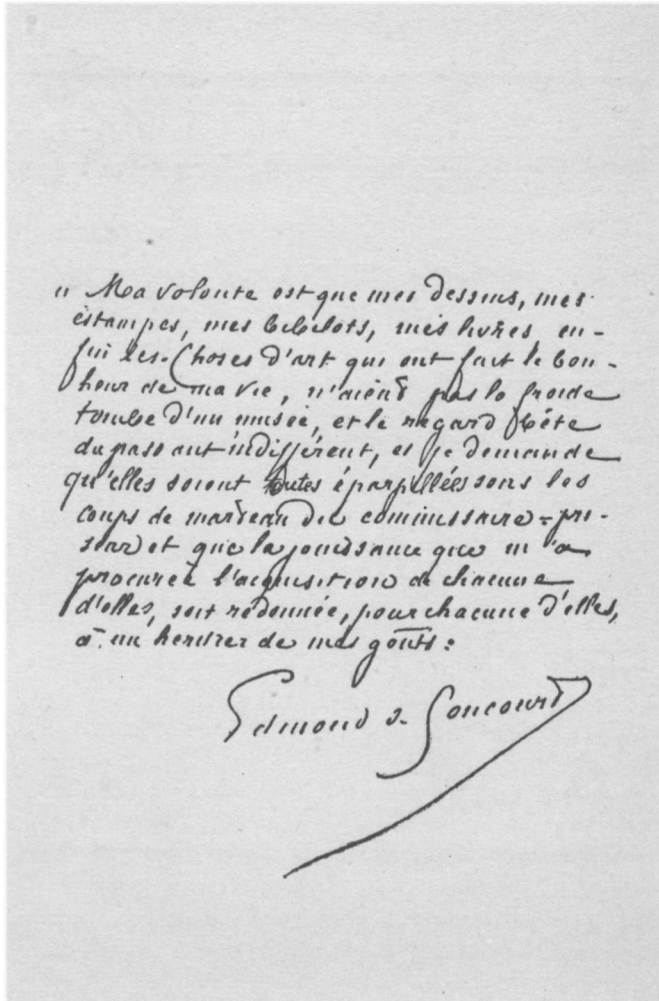


Figure 1. Edmond de Goncourt's testament, 1896, in *Le Livre et l'Image*, n.s., no. 1 (March 1910):6.

Mediterranean sea.<sup>4</sup> These *spolia* are grouped according to historical, iconographic, and above all aesthetic criteria, forming small, partly self-contained compositions (fig. 2). Interspaced among the remains are new rectangular stones bearing inscriptions such as:

4. The domain of Glienicke (or Klein-Glienicke) in its present restored state was created by Carl von Preussen between 1824 and his death in 1883, with the help of Karl Friedrich Schinkel and the garden and landscape architect Peter Joseph Lenné. See Friedrich Wilhelm Goethert with Christoph Börker, *Katalog der Antikensammlung des Prinzen Carl von Preussen im Schloss zu Klein-Glienicke bei Potsdam* (Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern, 1972); and Gerd-H. Zuchold, *Der Klosterhof des Prinzen Karl von Preussen im Park von Schloss Glienicke in Berlin*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1993).

"Brought back from the ruins of Carthage by H.R.H. Prince Carl on 19th March 1877" (fig. 3). These labels accompany the memories of ancient times with a sort of lapidary journal, which makes explicit the personal, even autobiographical, dimension of an enterprise to which princely collecting, the neo-Classical cult of Italy and antiquity, and the Romantic love of ruins and fragments also contributed. The perpetuation of this arrangement, facilitated by the technique employed to bring it into being, corresponds therefore to what became at some point an element of the original function, that of erecting a pleasurable monument to the taste and life of the founder.

I have discussed elsewhere another, more familiar case, which fits also more clearly into the category of collectors' museums: that of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, opened to the public in 1903 in Boston.<sup>5</sup> Since it is also here the object of an essay by its senior curator Alan Chong, I will limit myself to a few observations. The setting and some arrangements of stone fragments can remind one of the aesthetics at play in Glienicke, especially in the grandly spectacular and yet intimate inner courtyard (fig. 4). But the collections assembled by Mrs. Gardner are not only much larger, they are also more varied in the range of art objects and more complex in their organization. The reasons behind her idiosyncratic assemblages and presentations of objects can only be surmised and, in this hermeneutic as well as in an aesthetic sense, they appeal to the spectator's imagination in a way analogous to the fin-de-siècle art that is their contemporary.<sup>6</sup> Among the enigmas proposed by these silent conversations, one of the most intriguing is created by the combination of Titian's *Rape of Europa*, a bronze putto (attributed to François Duquesnoy) lying underneath the painting in a position echoing that of Europa, and a silk garment fabric from Lyon serving as a background. The fact that the fabric was cut from a gown designed by Frederick Worth for Gardner herself seems to belong to the same erotic subtext revealed in the letters to her agent Bernard Berenson after receiving the painting: "I have no words! I feel 'all over in one spot,' as we say. I am too excited to talk."<sup>7</sup> The dimension of self-representation,

5. See Dario Gamboni, "The Museum as a Work of Art: Site Specificity and Extended Agency," *Kritische Berichte* 33/3 (2005):16–27.

6. See Alan Chong's essay in the present issue of *RES* and Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002).

7. See Hilliard T. Goldfarb, *The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: A Companion Guide and History* (Boston/New Haven/

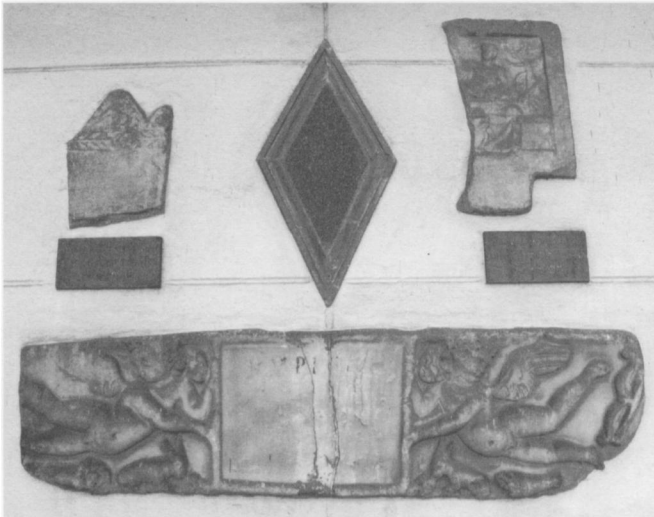


Figure 2. Schloss Glienicke, Berlin-Potsdam, archeological fragments arranged on the north wall of the inner garden by Prince Carl von Preussen. Photograph by the author.



Figure 3. Schloss Glienicke, inscription on the north wall of the inner garden, 1877. Photograph by the author.

omnipresent at various levels and in various guises, clearly extended to the museum as a whole, which was tellingly defined as her work in an artistic sense by the painter and Harvard art lecturer Denman Ross when he told Mrs. Gardner publicly in 1911 that she was “not only the lover of Art, and the Collector, but the Artist, having built the house and having arranged all the objects which it contains in the order and unity of a single idea.”<sup>8</sup>

London: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum/Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 118–119.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 20.



Figure 4. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, view of the north end of the court seen from the west. Photograph by the author.

### Centrifugal versus centripetal forces

This “single idea,” which manages to turn a gathering of objects of various origins into an ensemble that is more than the sum of its parts, can be regarded as a centripetal force—whether it was effective since the beginning or is teleologically projected onto the museum by the visitor who experiences an effect of unity. In order to exist and endure, collectors’ museums need to feed such centripetal forces and to resist centrifugal ones. The latter are numerous, from insurance costs to wear and tear, changes of taste, changes in attribution, changes in the interest (or lack thereof) of the public, and so on. Especially after the founders’ death, the energy they invested into bringing and keeping art together must be renewed continuously, with the help of the devices already mentioned.

It is worth mentioning at this point that many intermediary solutions exist between the total dissolution, by way of auction for instance, and the complete preservation of a given collection. The recent exhibition devoted to the collecting activities of the two brothers, Stephen and Sterling Clark, has shown how the diverging strategies they pursued in many respects climaxed in the way they organized their respective legacies.<sup>9</sup> While Sterling founded a museum—the Clark Institute, which organized this show—Stephen chose to

9. See *The Clark Brothers Collect: Impressionist and Early Modern Paintings*, exhib. cat., ed. Michael Conforti et al. (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006).

disperse his collection to a range of institutions, in particular the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Yale University Art Gallery. This was less of a break in continuity than might be imagined, since he had been closely associated with these museums—for instance as a trustee of the Metropolitan—and he carefully considered the compatibility between each work he donated and its new destination and environment. Stephen Clark's dispersal of his collection was in this sense consistent with a conception of the private collector's activity integrated into a collective network of institutions that are eventually directed toward the public at large. The position of large donations or bequests to existing museums, however, is also notoriously fraught with tensions between some donors' wish that their former collection retain a visible identity and the interest of the museums in a coherent handling and presentation of their overall possessions. Another recent exhibition, by the National Gallery in London, of the bequest made to it in 1924 by the industrialist Ludwig Mond, was thus organized in part to respond to the claim made by one of his descendants that the gallery had not respected the donor's wishes, since the forty-two paintings had not been hung together in a single room.<sup>10</sup> The fact that Mond's great-great-grandson asked for the National Gallery to return the works serves to emphasize the connection such a dispute has with the general issue of repatriation, which also revolves around the link between objects and identity, collective or—in the case of spoliated collectors, for example—individual.

The "energy renewal" necessary for collectors' museums to endure depends to an important extent on the capacity of the collection as a whole to exert a lasting power of attraction and even fascination. The public disaffection for permanent presentations therefore questions their very *raison d'être*, and they are rarely in a position to evade it with an important program of temporary exhibitions and other "events." This makes their predicament all the more interesting, as they cannot abandon their original mission but must define it as an asset in appealing terms. A flyer for the Frick Collection in New York boasts that it possesses "a refined, luxurious ambiance that makes it unlike any other U.S. museum," that "the Collection reflects its founder's discerning eye," and that "the galleries are largely as they were when the museum was a private

house, so that, as *Town & Country* magazine observed, 'The Frick offers an experience akin to stepping into the pristine period rooms that other museums carefully cordon off.'" Another flyer, for the Villa Flora in Winterthur, Switzerland, is entitled "Experience Art in a Unique Atmosphere."<sup>11</sup>

These museums make clear that the works of art they display and the manner in which they are displayed also reflect an individual's taste and personality, and that they give access not only to these discrete works, but also to the collector, his or her time, and to the "atmosphere" that they jointly created. This is a quality that can be called in semiotic terms "indexical": Collectors' museums do not only represent their founders with iconic portraits or by symbolically "standing for" them, but also by connecting them physically with the visitors, by way of the objects they touched and—often—of the place they inhabited. It is a type of experience and interest that the modernist conception of art and the museum regarded as primitive and irrelevant, so that when the house and collection bequeathed by Gustave Moreau to the French nation opened to the public in 1903, Marcel Proust wrote that one should "take away the furniture."<sup>12</sup> But we are now in a position to respect and value it, all the more as it integrates the museum experience into an anthropologically much broader domain, and as contemporary art has tended to emphasize precisely the indexical properties of objects and their connection to a specific place or "site."<sup>13</sup> From this point of view, collectors' museums come close to another heritage category, that of "historical houses,"<sup>14</sup> and one understands better the presence within them of objects and practices related to the world of relics—the piece of fabric from Mrs. Gardner's gown being again a remarkable case in point.

The indexical quality of collectors' museums and their relation to the cult of images—of the saints and more generally of the dead—is also confirmed by the

11. The Villa Flora was inherited and transformed by Hedy and Arthur Hahnloser-Bühler to house their collection of Swiss and French art amassed between 1907 and 1930 and has been turned into a museum since; see Margrit Hahnloser-Ingold and Ursula Perucchi-Petri, *Villa Flora Winterthur: aus der Sammlung Arthur und Hedy Hahnloser-Bühler* (Schaffhausen: Meier, 1995).

12. Marcel Proust, "Notes sur le monde mystérieux de Gustave Moreau" [undated], in M. Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 667–674.

13. See Dario Gamboni, "'Independent of Time and Place': On the Rise and Decline of a Modernist Ideal," in *Time and Space: The Geohistory of Art*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann (Williston, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 173–201.

10. M. B., "National Gallery Reassembles Largest Single Bequest in Its History," *The Art Newspaper* 171 (July–August 2006):15.

fact that several of them, including historically significant ones, were conceived as, or rapidly transformed into, mausoleums of their founders. The presence of the bodies can be discreet and unknown to the general public, as is the case at the Clark Institute, or it can be dramatized—as was done, for instance, at the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, where the sculptor's tomb, placed in the middle of the inner courtyard, literally builds the center of the installation.<sup>15</sup> This is, of course, the museum of an artist, but artists' museums, collectors' museums, and historical houses are overlapping categories, and Bertel Thorvaldsen, when he agreed to leave Rome and return to his native Copenhagen, did it on condition that a museum be created not only for his own plaster models and marble statues, but for his other collections as well, including that of antiques. To give another example, the Dulwich Picture Gallery, built in 1811–1817 by John Soane—the first building conceived as a museum and the first public gallery in England—includes a mausoleum for its founders Sir Francis Bourgeois and Noel Desenfans, two art dealers who had originally assembled the collection for the King of Poland Stanislas Augustus but were left with it when he had to abdicate.<sup>16</sup> This mausoleum is clearly signaled by its projecting outside the main building and by a lantern comparable to the “dome” of Soane's own museum at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields in London,<sup>17</sup> which brings light into it while pointing to an unspecified transcendental realm.

A less final centripetal force is the search for the ideal form and the ideal museum, which often informs the collectors' design of their museums and installation of their collections, a process that often extends over a long period of time. An interesting trace of such a process is the suitcase with portable models of the building and main gallery of the Clark Art Institute (fig. 5) that Sterling Clark and his wife Francine took with them on their European trip while discussing the project with the architect Daniel Perry. Although fabricated as a



Figure 5. Suitcase with portable models of the future building and galleries of the Clark Art Institute used by Sterling and Francine Clark while traveling in Europe. Photograph by the author.

temporary tool and not a metawork of art like Marcel Duchamp's slightly earlier *Boîte-en-valise*,<sup>18</sup> this suitcase attests to the utopian—in the etymological sense—aspect of a site-specific creation, an aspect also emphasized by the neo-Classical vocabulary and the white marble of the building.<sup>19</sup>

#### Collectors' museums as cases of distributed artistic agency

Since the nineteenth century, enduring links between artworks and the collections or collectors to whom they belonged were established by names given to (anonymous) artists and to works, such as the “Master of the Gardner Annunciation”—a painting in the Gardner Museum now attributed to the Umbrian artist Piermatteo d'Amelia—or the “Rokeby Venus,” a designation of Velazquez's *Toilet of Venus* deriving from it having been in the Morrill Collection at Rokeby Hall in Yorkshire before its acquisition by the National Gallery in London in 1906. As for the recognition that bringing, showing, and keeping art together amount to creative acts—

14. See *Historic House Museums as Witnesses of National and Local Identities: Acts of the Third Annual DEMHIST Conference, Amsterdam, 14–16 October 2002* (Amsterdam: Instituut Collectie Nederland, 2003).

15. See Bente Lange, *Thorvaldsen's Museum: Architecture—Colours—Light* (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2002), pp. 71–78.

16. See Giles Waterfield, “Dulwich Picture Gallery: An Artist's Shrine?” In *Soane and Death*, ed. G. Waterfield (London: Dulwich Gallery, 1996), pp. 52–69.

17. See Gillian Darley, *John Soane: An Accidental Romantic* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 207, 222, 268–277.

18. See Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: The Box in a Valise de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Selavy. Inventory of an Edition* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

19. See Conforti et al. (note 9) and Timothy Cahill, *Art in Nature: The Clark Inside and Out* (Williamstown/New Haven/London: Clark Art Institute/Yale University Press, 2006).

expressed for instance in Denman Ross's definition of Mrs. Gardner as an artist—it has spread in the course of the twentieth century, particularly in recent decades. This development is related to what I have called "the return of the context," that is, the renewed acknowledgement that on social, aesthetic, and phenomenological levels, the context is consubstantial to the individual object as a work of art.<sup>20</sup> But it has not taken place without conflicts and ambivalences, especially on the part of artists, reluctant to be seen as providing only the "raw matter" for works of art credited to others. Nonetheless, I would argue that the long-term tendency we are witnessing and participating in goes—for better or for worse—toward an understanding of the authorship of cultural artifacts (and events) as a collective and open-ended process, so that works of art tend to be seen as the continuously evolving result of interventions by many different actors, among them collectors and curators.<sup>21</sup>

The late British anthropologist Alfred Gell has proposed a formalization of this understanding in his much-discussed *Art and Agency*.<sup>22</sup> He defined the notion of "agent" as relative, linked dialectically to that of "patient," and suggested to extend artistic agency beyond the artist to the "index" (the work itself), the prototype (what the work represents), and the recipient. The recipient's agency is obvious when he or she is the "cause of the artist's action (as patron)," but the contextual impact made upon a work by the owner or curator is another instance in which the recipient is "the cause of the . . . form taken by the index." Gell uses tree diagrams to analyze the way in which, in concrete cases, agency and "patience" are distributed among the various actors involved, what he calls "the hierarchical embeddedness of agent-patient relations."<sup>23</sup>

We can try to apply this model (here in verbal form) to instances involving the founders of collectors' museums such as the Gardner Museum. The Titian arrangement already discussed could be analyzed as follows: Europa, Jupiter, bulls, and Philip of Spain

variously acted upon Titian as prototypes, and Titian as agent realized the painting, which turned agent to impact many viewers including, at some point, Mrs. Gardner, prompting her to purchase it and express her ravishment as we have seen. She then exerted her agency simultaneously upon Titian's *Europa*, the bronze putto attributed to Duquesnoy, the Worth fabric, an enameled plate, two Venetian tables, and a few other objects and pieces of furniture, by installing them together against the east wall of what would be called the "Titian Room." Since then, this assemblage has impressed in its turn not only Mrs. Gardner, but also many visitors to her home and museum, and encouraged some to ponder over, and inquire into, the causes for this peculiar display and its meaning.

One must add to this that as a result of the founder's wish, made binding in her will, that nothing in the galleries ever be changed from their original installation, this assemblage has also strongly impacted and limited the later curators' agency. In fact, such an act can even seem to contradict the very tendency of which it is an expression by claiming for itself an exclusivity and permanence that exclude further interventions and thereby put a halt to the collective, continuing process of artistic agency. Ivan Gaskell has criticized in this sense the return to original arrangements sometimes implemented in collections open to the public by writing that "the subordination of the individual work of art to an overall scheme is of course inherent in any gallery arrangement, but when that arrangement is chosen because of its illumination of an individual's taste in an uncritical manner and is instituted as a permanent, not a temporary, arrangement, a petrifying authoritarianism seems inherent in the project."<sup>24</sup>

"Petrification" or "fossilization" seems an apt metaphor for the eternizing intention that is part of the collectors' museums as monuments and mausoleums. In a way, that is only superficially paradoxical; decisions directed against time make it difficult to cope with its effects, as when one is forced to choose between a given arrangement and the physical preservation of its elements—for example, carpets. How traumatic the undesired intervention of others can become is illustrated by the empty frames of the Rembrandts stolen on March 18, 1990, in the Dutch Room of the Gardner Museum—an unintentional arrangement that nonetheless inspired the French artist Sophie Calle,

20. See Dario Gamboni, "Déplacer égale détruire? Notes historiques sur un argument théorique," *Annales d'Histoire de l'Art et d'Archéologie de l'Université de Bruxelles* 17 (1997):33–46; and Gamboni (see note 13).

21. A clear indication of this tendency is the development of studies in the history of display, including richly illustrated books for a broad public, such as the recent *Art and the Power of Placement* by Victoria Newhouse (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005).

22. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. pp. 28–36.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

24. Ivan Gaskell, "History of Images," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke, pp. 168–192 (London: Polity, 1991), p. 181.

fascinated by absence and disappearance, for an installation of her own.<sup>25</sup>

### Preservation and the arbitration of values

Gell's point of view is intentionally free of values, so that he does not distinguish between collectors and thieves, legitimate and illegitimate agents, or between good—desirable, positive, relevant, enriching—and bad interventions. An iconoclast, or “vandal,” like Mary Richardson, who attacked the “Rokeby Venus” in 1914 to protest the treatment inflicted by the government upon Emily Pankhurst, leader of the suffrage movement, thus becomes in *Art and Agency* the coauthor of the painting, which Gell calls the “‘Slashed’ Rokeby Venus, the work of a suffragette artist, Mary Richardson (and Velázquez) . . . before it was superseded by the ‘restored Rokeby Venus’ which can be seen in the National Gallery today (by Velázquez and the Museum’s picture-restoration staff).”<sup>26</sup> This “amoral” attitude has clear advantages as far as the analysis of what Gell calls “the shared biographical spaces of persons and images” is concerned, but it also has limits as soon as one is involved in, and has to pass a judgment or take a decision about, these “spaces” and situations.

We have seen, for example, that Carl von Preussen could boast of having “brought back [*mitgebracht*] from the ruins of Carthage” specific fragments, although the case of the “Elgin marbles” had already shown that the same person could be regarded by some as a collector and by others as a thief. Mrs. Gardner had to fight with new laws regulating the acquisition and transfer of artistic heritage, which her agent Bernard Berenson occasionally helped to circumvent. The issue of provenance and repatriation, which we saw might be compared to the problem of private collections within public institutions, can therefore directly concern the ethics and the legal base of collectors’ museums as well.

Value judgments are also necessary when museums are faced with new conditions and need to combine adaptation with preservation. The flyer for the Frick Collection already quoted adds to its praise of the

founder’s “discerning eye” that the collection is “augmented by acquisitions made since Mr. Frick’s death,” and the same is true of the Clark Art Institute among other collectors’ museums: This right to expand, while avoiding the danger of “authoritarian petrification,” also raises questions about the legibility of the “original” collection and the coherence of its successive, enlarged identities. An interesting case is that of the Parisian art dealer Ghislain Mollet-Viéville, who redefined himself as an “art agent” and abandoned his gallery in favor of his apartment in the 1980s before letting the Musée d’art moderne et contemporain (Mamco) in Geneva reconstitute its content in 1996. Although the galleries henceforth known as “the collector’s apartment” aim at recreating the logic and ambiance of his private home, he also suggested that the museum introduce in it regularly new works by young artists, so as to “preserve the living and evolving character of this singular space.”<sup>27</sup> He thereby delegated his collector’s agency to the museum that integrated his collection, but other collectors are less generous or less explicit.

There is therefore a need for distinctions and criteria, which Gell’s conceptual apparatus does not provide. A better model in this respect is Alois Riegl’s 1903 *The Modern Cult of Monuments*, written by the art historian and museum director in response to a request to provide guidelines for the conservation of the “monuments of art and history” [*Kunstdenkmäler*] of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>28</sup> Riegl observed that intentional monuments—among which we can count most collectors’ museums—were considerably augmented by the larger class of unintentional monuments, that is, whatever came to be considered as monument by “modern subjects.” In addition, he noted that what made these “monuments” worthy of the name and of being preserved was a set of values (fig. 6) divided into the categories of “memory” and “present,” which were partly opposed to and

25. Sophie Calle, *Last Seen . . . (Rembrandt, The Storm in the Sea of Galilee. A Lady and a Gentleman in Black) 1991*, installation at the 51st Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 1991–1992, reproduced in *Sophie Calle, Absence*, exhib. cat. (Lausanne: Musée cantonal des beaux-arts de Lausanne, 1994), p. 43.

26. Gell (see note 22), pp. 62–64; see also Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion, 1997), pp. 93–97.

27. See Michel Gauthier, “Ghislain Mollet-Viéville, l’art du mixte,” *Art Press* (October 1985):24–25; Ghislain Mollet-Viéville, “De quelques réflexions sur l’idée d’une collection autre,” in *Passions privées. Collections particulières d’art moderne et contemporain en France*, exhib. cat. (Paris: Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1995), pp. 104–106; Valérie Mavridorakis, “L’appartement,” information sheet (Geneva: Mamco, 1996).

28. Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* [1903], reprinted in Georg Dehio, A. Riegl, *Konservieren, nicht restaurieren. Streitschriften zur Denkmalpflege um 1900* (Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: Vieweg-Verlag, 1988); English translation: “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin,” *Oppositions* 25 (1982):21–51.



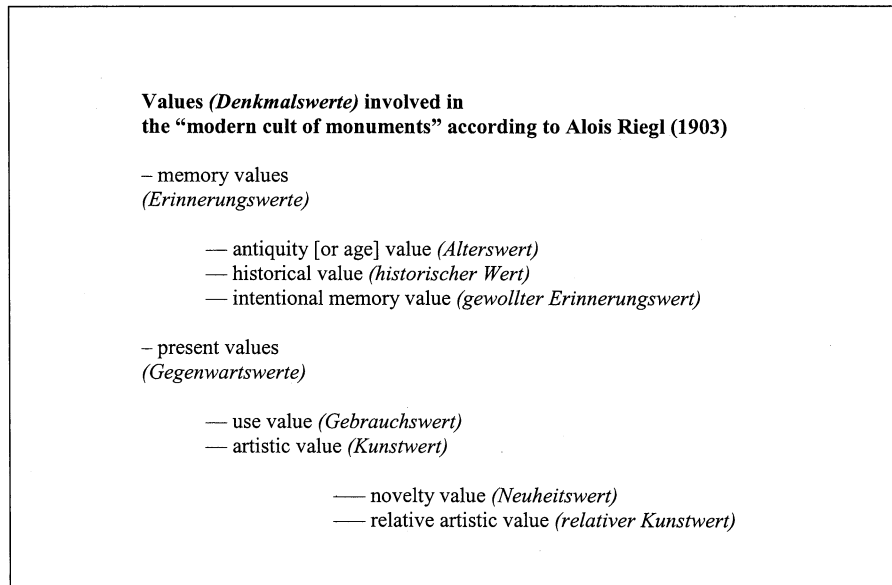


Figure 6. Values [*Denkmalswerte*] involved in the “modern cult of monuments” according to Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (1903). The author’s summary of Riegl’s typology of “monumental values.”

competing between each other. As a result, rational decisions about preservation and conservation (in Gell’s terms, the exercise of agency upon the artwork as patient) require a weighing of these values and arbitration between them.

A few examples may illuminate the possible use of this instrument. Gell suggested that the restorers of the National Gallery had destroyed the “work of Richardson and Velázquez.” Using Riegl’s concepts, one can assume that the decision to restore *The Toilet of Venus* resulted from a greater weight given to the relative artistic value of Velázquez’s painting than to whatever contribution Richardson had made to its historical value and to the specific intentional memory value inherent in her action. In all probability, any museum would still do the same, and be in my opinion justified to do so; the only thing that an anthropologist and an art historian duly interested in the continuing history of the work might wish is a better documentation of the attack and its effects, such as tends to be done nowadays. This is far from being only an academic issue, since artists or would-be artists have increasingly come to claim as art illegal interventions upon existing works of art and denounced the subsequent restoration of these works as a destruction of their own artistic contribution.<sup>29</sup>

29. See Jeffrey Kastner, “Art Attack,” *Artnews* (October 1997):154–156; Dario Gamboni, “Image to Destroy, Indestructible

Coming back to private collections, a case regarding an individual work is provided by *The Days of Creation*, a polyptich painted in 1875–1876 by Edward Burne-Jones and bought in 1934 by the American collector Grenville L. Winthrop.<sup>30</sup> When he installed the large work in his New York home, Winthrop discarded the original frame designed by the artist and divided the five panels, for which he had separate, simpler frames made. The collection was bequeathed to Harvard University in 1943 and the paintings are still presented in Winthrop’s frames at the Fogg Art Museum. The destruction of the material unity of the polyptich and of the original frame, with its architecture and inscription, is probably due to the fact that the collector gave more weight to the use value—the dismantling made it easier to install the panels in his rooms—and to the novelty value—elaborate historicizing frames were out of fashion in the 1930s. One could argue today for a reconstitution of Burne-Jones’s frame in order to regain this lost element

Image,” in *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, exhib. cat., ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, ZKM-Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe (Cambridge, Mass./London: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 88–135.

30. *A Private Passion: 19th-Century Paintings and Drawings from the Grenville L. Winthrop Collection*, Harvard University, exhib. cat., ed. Stephan Wolohojian (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), p. 43.

of the historical and artistic value of the painting, since it is known from a photograph and had been executed by a craftsman. Winthrop's installation is also documented photographically, but his frames would have to be preserved.

As for the questions raised by a collection and a collectors' museum as a whole, the controversies surrounding the fate of the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, are sufficient proof of the plurality and antagonism of values diagnosed by Riegl. The Barnes Foundation is a paradigmatic case of "petrification," made all the more interesting and problematic as the arrangements of works and the conditions of access to the museum defined by the founder were idiosyncratic. The court decision to grant the foundation permission to break Dr. Albert C. Barnes's will (which required that his collection remain in the galleries he had built in suburban Merion) in order to move it to a new building in downtown Philadelphia, was preceded, accompanied, and followed by an intense debate about the relative importance of the location, the integrity of the collection, and the preservation of its installation. A detailed analysis of the case would go beyond the scope of this essay, but we may note that among the issues at stake are the artistic and historical values of Barnes's contribution to the (history of the) works involved, the importance of a physical preservation of his arrangements, and an assessment of the extension of the relevant "context." The statements recently made by the new director, Derek Gillman, hired after the judgment mentioned, indirectly attest to the strength of the arguments opposed to this decision: against critics claiming that the planned relocation would "destroy a unique cultural treasure," he argued that his aim was to "realize the original vision of Dr. Barnes and the institution's first director, philosopher John Dewey" that the new building would recreate "the particular disposition of the rooms and their interconnections, and the hang of the pictures," as well as "the sense of intimacy and . . . the semi-domestic character" of the Marion house.<sup>31</sup>

A part of the problem is that such a recreation, amounting inevitably to a re-presentation, cannot do justice to what I have called the indexical quality of collectors' museums. Yet it is also true that the material preservation of the "original substance" is only one form of preservation and rarely goes without some element of

reconstitution.<sup>32</sup> Preservation is generally mixed and can use conduits such as fragments, reproductions, or even stories. Edmond de Goncourt's decision to "destroy" his collection should thus be revisited in the light of the images produced of it, including in portraits of the collector. His two-volume book *The House of an Artist* (1881), an exhaustive inventory and meticulous description of the collection in situ, is of particular relevance here: Having asserted his agency and transubstantiated the collection into his own medium, that of writing, de Goncourt could safely consider that its future was assured and let its material substance be dispersed among the heirs to his taste.

32. See David Lowenthal, "Material Preservation and Its Alternatives," *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 25 (1989): 67–77.

31. "New Barnes Director Reveals Plans for the Future," *Art Newspaper* 172 (September 2006):11–12. On the "relocation equals destruction" argument, see Gamboni (note 20).