

The Agency of Display

Objects, Framings
and Parerga

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Ready-Made Eye-Opener: Models, Functions and Meanings of the Ironwork in Albert C. Barnes's Displays

The Barnes Foundation is both famous and infamous for the way in which it displays the works of art collected by Albert C. Barnes. The displays were designed by Barnes himself and for some commentators, they express the collector's idiosyncrasy and amount to great art being held hostage to a rich man's whims.¹ For others and especially for Barnes's collaborators, his disciples, and the students of the Foundation, they are the instruments of a veritable school of seeing.² Another controversy surrounding the Barnes Foundation concerns its location. When it decided to move from suburban Merion, where Barnes had established it, to downtown Philadelphia, opposition resulted in the courts authorizing the move only on condition that the displays be recreated in the new building, which itself replicates the dimensions and disposition of the rooms. A positive outcome of this turn of events is that a greater amount of scholarly and public attention has since been devoted to the displays as such. *Masterworks*, the catalogue written by Judith F. Dolkart and Martha Lucy for the reopening of the Foundation in 2012, and the didactic apparatus included in the new presentation explicitly discuss Barnes's ensembles, the mural compositions that he arranged and rearranged until 1951, when his death and his testament made them final.³

Signs on the Wall

A particularly odd aspect of Barnes's displays is the inclusion of ironwork on the walls alongside the paintings. It never fails to strike visitors but remained unstudied until very recently.⁴ Yet in relation to the question of display and the agency of objects, this aspect

¹ See for example: Greenfeld, *The Devil and Dr. Barnes*, 1987; Anderson, *Art Held Hostage*, 2003. ² See: Meyers, *Art, Education, & African-American Culture*, 2004. ³ See: Dolkart and Lucy, *The Barnes Foundation, Masterworks*, 2012. ⁴ See: Wattenmaker, 'In the Light of New Material,' 2015. In her preface to this catalogue, Judith Dolkart estimates the number of objects concerned at 'nearly nine hundred' and lists them as 'hinges and hasps, locks and keys, door knockers and latches, dough cutters and surgical saws' (Cathelineau and Dolkart (eds.), *Strength and Splendor*, 2015, p. 7). Wattenmaker considers that it is 'one

is of particular interest, since it raises the issue of what the ironwork does to the paintings, what they do together to the spectators that the paintings alone could not do, and whether the wrought iron pieces are *parerga* to the paintings, or *erga* in their own right, or play roles that are mutable and exchangeable. The oddity lies in the disregard that their combination manifests toward taxonomy and hierarchy, mixing as it does paintings by the likes of Cézanne and Matisse with anonymous appliances, fine art of the greatest symbolic and financial value with specimens of the so-called decorative and applied arts, which may be beautifully crafted but are much less prized. How should one account for this unusual yet intentional feature of display?

An answer came to me during my first visit to the Foundation in Merion, on 30 January 2009, by way of observations I made and photographs I took, in response to the question itself.⁵ What dawned upon me after a while and became a crucial element in the experience of my visit was that there exist meaningful and consistent relations between the paintings and the ironwork, relations that one could call resemblances, analogies or (metaphorically) rhymes, and that the pieces of wrought iron point to characteristics of the paintings. The iron fittings placed on top of Charles Demuth's *Masts* and of Henri Matisse's *Reclining Nude* in Room 18 (Fig. 1), for example, parallel the respectively vertical and horizontal formats of the two pictures and emphasize their contrasted compositional structure: the geometric, almost orthogonal skeleton provided by the mast and yards in Demuth's painting is further abstracted by a hinge topped with a keyhole escutcheon; the same process is applied by a serpentine hinge to the sensuous arabesque of Matisse's odalisque, while the centrality of the nude's belly is wittily underscored by a sixteenth-century *repoussé* plaque in the shape of three intertwined crescents.

Such analogies, once their possibility has entered into one's consciousness, prove to be too systematic to be accidental. Their existence also finds a confirmation and an expansion in echoes of the same kind noticeable among the various paintings as well as between the paintings and other objects, such as pieces of early American furniture or ceramics, the presence of which also tends to confuse visitors used to the purist aesthetics of the white-box displays of modern art. In Room 23, for example, a chromatic, formal and directional analogy connects the nude boy carrying a vase on his head in Pablo Picasso's *Young Girl with Goat* (1906), the red tower of an eponymous painting by Giorgio De Chirico (1913) and an oversized candle, placed side by side.⁶

There is a special quality in the experience of noticing such relations oneself, without being alerted to their existence, and of being at first unsure of discovering or inventing

of the outstanding collections of wrought iron objects in the United States,' with works coming 'mainly from America, France, and Germany, but also [...] by Spanish, Italian, Netherlandish, and English smiths,' while 'the origins, nomenclature, and dates of fabrication often remain imprecise' (Wattenmaker, 'In the Light of New Material,' 2015, p. 26). **5** My thanks to Martha Lucy for welcoming me at the Foundation and authorizing me to take and reproduce photographs of the displays. **6** Reproduced in Gamboni, "'Musées d'auteur",' 2011, p. 199.

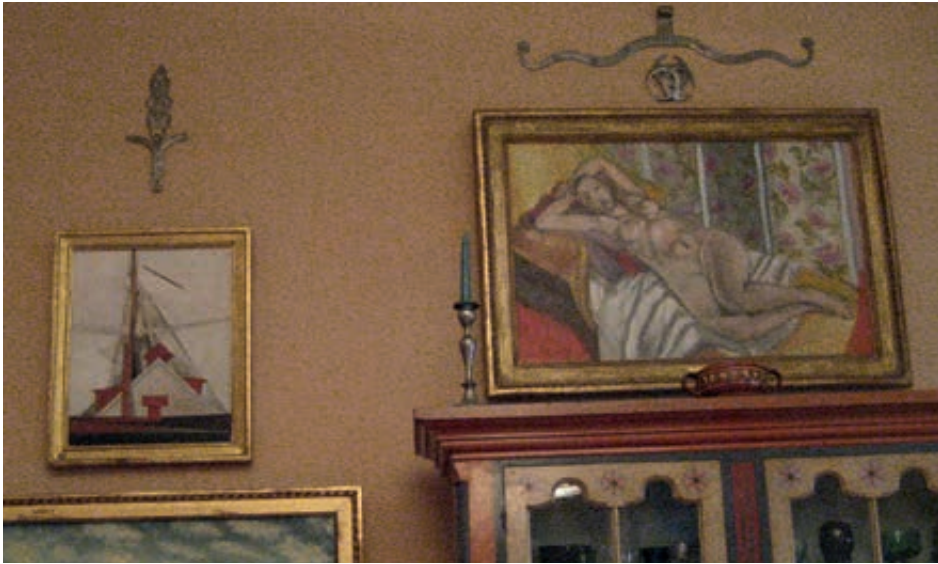


Figure 1:
Barnes Foundation, Room 18, detail from the East wall: *Masts* (1919) by Charles Demuth and *Reclining Nude* (1923–1924) by Henri Matisse, topped by ironwork.

them. Writing about the Musée Gustave Moreau in Paris, André Breton thus spoke in 1960 of the ‘intersigns fluttering’ between two paintings, and of dreaming to ‘intercept’ them, ‘exactly half-way between the external eye and the white-hot inner eye.’⁷ Nonetheless, I was thrilled to find quoted in *Masterworks* an unpublished letter from Barnes to the American painter Stuart Davis in which, on 1 April 1942, the collector explained the inclusion of ironwork in his displays:

‘First – the motives, such as arabesques, patterns, etc., discernible in a picture have their analogue, sometimes a very close one, in the iron work. Second – we regard the creators of antique wrought iron, just as authentic an artist as a Titian, Renoir, or Cézanne. This is not to say that what they express is of equal importance or magnitude, but that they do express something of their own experience.’⁸

Since then, Richard J. Wattenmaker quoted two other letters in which Barnes gave similar explanations: on 29 December 1936, Barnes wrote to Kenneth Clark, then director of the National Gallery in London, that he was on his way to show ‘that there is no essential esthetic difference between the forms of the great painters or sculptors, and those of the iron-workers of several hundred years who made such commonplace objects as

⁷ Breton, ‘Gustave Moreau [1960],’ 2002, p. 363. ⁸ Quoted after Dolkart, ‘To See As the Artist Sees,’ 2012, p. 26. The letter is quoted more extensively in Wattenmaker, ‘In the Light of New Material,’ 2015, p. 33.

⁹ Quoted in Wattenmaker, ‘In the Light of New Material,’ 2015, pp. 30 and 25. ¹⁰ Dewey, ‘The Educational Function of a Museum of Decorative Arts,’ 1937, p. 98. ¹¹ Dewey, ‘The Educational Function of a Museum

hinges, door handles, locks, etc.’; and on 5 March 1948, he wrote to the antiques dealer and scholar Charles F. Montgomery that he intended to prove his case that ‘the great artists of all time’ included ‘workers in the so-called useful arts like wrought iron, pewter, glass, pottery, etc.’ by ‘putting pieces of wrought iron next to some of the best paintings covering the period from the 13th to the 20th centuries.’⁹

The disregard of taxonomies, therefore, corresponded to Barnes’s anti-hierarchical attitude, also expressed—not without contradictions and unintended results—in his way of granting or refusing access to the collection, which privileged workers and black Americans at the expense of collectors and art historians. Barnes was not alone in his convictions and a 1937 article by his close collaborator the philosopher John Dewey, entitled ‘The Educational Function of a Museum of Decorative Arts,’ called for ‘the breaking down of the walls that so long divided what were called the fine arts from applied and industrial arts,’ and hailed the Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration in New York for arranging its objects ‘on the basis of community of design rather than by historic periods,’ since ‘for the purpose of learning to see the design in virtue of which an object has esthetic form, grouping together a chair, a rug, a ceramic object and a piece of iron work may be much more effective.’¹⁰ This purpose fitted the fact that ‘artist-designers’ occupied a central place in the public of such museums and of the schools associated with them: ‘To learn to see for artistic purposes is to learn to detect organizing design, whether the object seen be a statue, a picture, a tapestry, a pitcher or a roll of wall-paper.’¹¹

This aim corresponded to the first reason given by Barnes in his letter to Davis, in which he employed the notion of ‘motif’ in a formal rather than iconographical sense, as the examples of ‘arabesques, patterns, etc.’ make clear. Dewey spoke of ‘plastic design’ and indeed, we can consider that Barnes prioritized the ‘plastic sign’ over the ‘iconic sign’—using the semiotic distinction proposed by the Belgian Groupe μ —without defining them as mutually exclusive.¹² This could suit the art of Stuart Davis, who included iconic references but abstracted elements such as buildings, trees, boats, windows, etc. to the point where they composed a vocabulary of quasi-pictograms, combinable in colourful patterns. There are no works by Davis in the Barnes Foundation, but many objects attest to the collector’s preference for abstracted shapes and some of them are very similar to the silhouettes of the ironwork on the walls, for example a bronze statuette in an orant position labelled ‘Persian / 8th century B.C.’ and animal figures painted on Native American earthenware containers.¹³

Barnes did not collect ‘non-objective’ art, and the kind of abstraction he enjoyed was indebted to the post-impressionist, ‘decorative’ ideal of a depiction emancipated from the ‘servile imitation of nature.’¹⁴ His explanation to Davis can thus be compared to Maurice

of Decorative Arts,’ 1937, p. 98. **12** See: Groupe μ , *Traité du signe visuel*, 1992. **13** See: Dolkart and Lucy, *The Barnes Foundation, Masterworks*, 2012, pp. 344–345. **14** Gauguin, ‘Notes sur l’art à l’Exposition Universelle,’ 1889, p. 86. See: Gamboni, *Paul Gauguin*, 2014, pp. 33–40.



Figure 2:
Vincent van Gogh, *The Postman (Joseph-Étienne Roulin)*, 1889,
oil on canvas, 65.7 × 55.2 cm, inv. BF37. Philadelphia, Barnes Foundation.

Denis's famous dictum that 'a picture—before being a warhorse, a nude woman or telling some other story—is essentially a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a particular pattern.'¹⁵ Another expression of the same ideal in Barnes's collection is Vincent van Gogh's portrait of *The Postman Joseph-Étienne Roulin* (Fig. 2), in which the model's bust is shown in front of an ornamental imaginary wallpaper. The arabesques of the vegetable motif echo those of the postman's bifurcated beard, and Barnes, who could not but notice such a device, may have been inspired by this fictional wall to provide his real ones with metal ornaments—he did not dress the walls of his galleries in patterned fabric or paper, as did the collectors and museum founders of the Gilded Age, nor did he paint them white, like the modernists, but he used jute cloth, a choice consonant with the primitivism of a Gauguin and a Van Gogh. The further abstracted forms of a later generation, for instance

those of Georges Braque and Joan Miró, brought the analogies between picture and neighbouring ironwork close to an identity of outline, as if picture and ironwork coincided midway between figuration and ornament.

Antecedents, Models and Parallels

Barnes's inclusion of ironwork was exceptional in the context of art displays, but not in the broader one of collections and museums at large, where precedents and possible models can be found in the realms of the decorative and applied arts and of ethnography. A local antecedent is the Mercer Museum, a vast collection of early American tools and everyday artefacts assembled by Henry Chapman Mercer, an archaeologist close to the American Arts and Crafts Movement, and displayed on a grand scale in a 1908–1910 concrete building in his native Doylestown, Pennsylvania, 27 miles north of Philadelphia.¹⁶ Further away, but internationally famous, was the Musée Le Secq des Tournelles in Rouen. Devoted to all objects made of iron, from Gallo-Roman antiquity to the present (Fig. 3), collected by the painter and photographer Jean-Louis Henri Le Secq Destournelles and his son Henri, it was installed in 1921 in a disused medieval church after partial presentations at the 1900 Universal Exposition and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.¹⁷

Barnes started collecting ironwork in the spring of 1936, after visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Musée Le Secq des Tournelles.¹⁸ His interest in such collections may seem surprising, since the focus of his own collecting activity until then had been modern painting, but it was connected to his social origins and concerns.¹⁹ Although he had become extremely wealthy, Albert Coombs Barnes was born in Kensington, a working-class neighbourhood to the north of Philadelphia. His father was a butcher, probably of Quaker origins, and his Methodist mother was descended from the German immigrants who had colonized a large part of the State. Barnes also collected Pennsylvania German furniture and utensils; their presence is relatively discrete in the galleries of the Foundation but they occupy pride of place in his country house Ker-Feal, a 1775 stone farmhouse in Chester County which he purchased in 1940 and arranged as a small museum of popular art.²⁰ In the realm of wrought iron, Barnes demonstrated a preference for simple, straightforward objects of everyday use, whereas Le Secq had searched for complex masterpieces.²¹

15 Louis [Denis], 'Definition of Neo-Traditionism,' 1890, pp. 540–542. It may be worth noting that Barnes, being born in 1872, belonged to the generation that Denis (born in 1870) called 'of 1890' and which comprised his fellow Nabis. **16** See: *The Mercer Museum Guide*, 1957. **17** See: Cathelineau, 'The Musée Le Secq des Tournelles,' 2015, pp. 11–24. **18** See: Cathelineau, 'The Musée Le Secq des Tournelles,' 2015, pp. 25 and 30. **19** See: Meyers, *Art, Education, & African-American Culture*, 2004. It must be added that Barnes did not only include ironwork in his displays but also, as Wattenmaker summarizes, 'works as diverse as African masks, examples of Chinese painting and calligraphy, New Mexican retablos, and dazzling Navajo rugs' (Wattenmaker, 'In the Light of New Material,' 2015, p. 25). **20** See: Dolkart and Lucy, *The Barnes Foundation, Masterworks*, 2012, pp. 23–25. **21** See: Wattenmaker, 'In the Light of New Material,' 2015, pp. 25 and 38.



Figure 3:
Seventeenth and eighteenth-century keyhole escutcheons,
plate CIV of Henri René d'Allemagne, *Musée Le Secq des Tournelles*.
Ferronnerie ancienne, part I (J. Schémit, 1924).

A parallel to Barnes's use of ironwork for pointing out the formal traits of paintings can be found in his method of pairing reproductions of pictures in his publications, regardless of their periods and iconography, in order to emphasize their similarities of shape and composition. An example among many from his major book *The Art in Painting*, first published in 1925, is the vertical juxtaposition of Titian's *Entombment of Christ* with Cézanne's *Curtain, Jug and Fruit Bowl* (Fig. 4), justified by Barnes on the grounds that the design of the two pictures is 'very similar in structure and expressive content.'²² At first sight, the comparison can seem absurd, given the worlds separating a Renaissance religious history painting from a late nineteenth-century still life; and there is no doubt that



Titian (392)



Cézanne (178)

Figure 4:
Albert C. Barnes, *The Art in Painting* (Barnes Foundation Press, 1925),
reproductions from *The Entombment of Christ* by Titian (c. 1520, Paris, Musée du Louvre)
and *Curtain, Jug and Fruit Bowl* by Cézanne (1893–1894, private collection).

such a comparison could not be made without the equalizing power of the black-and-white photographic reproduction of the two paintings, deprived of their frames and reduced to an identical scale.²³ If one accepts the rules of this game, however, it must be admitted that the comparison is based on objective formal and compositional resemblances and that it is capable of illuminating aspects of Cézanne's still life, such as its peculiar instability and its monumentalizing ambition.

²² Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 1925, p. 77. ²³ On the creative dimension of photographic reproduction and the semiotic challenge of the assemblage of images, see: Ullrich, *Raffinierte Kunst*, 2009 and Thürlemann, *Mehr als ein Bild*, 2013.

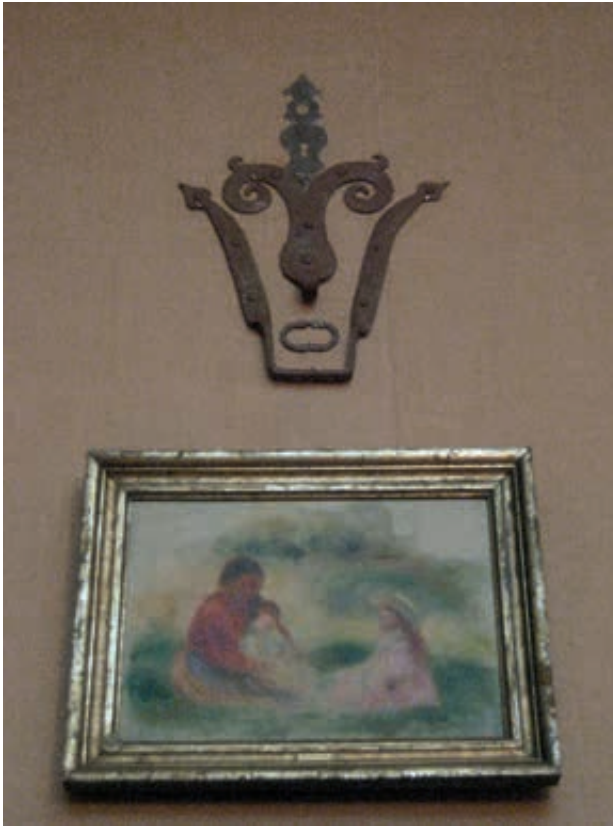


Figure 5:
Barnes Foundation, Room 14, detail from the West wall:
assemblage of wrought iron objects above Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Young Family*
(c. 1902–1903, oil on canvas, inv. BF543).

A broader parallel, which also suggests an element of genealogy, can be made with attempts at revealing the compositional structure of paintings by means of (more or less) diagrammatic drawings.²⁴ These go back to the eighteenth century but were especially popular in the early twentieth century, when the aesthetics of 'pure visibility,' *Gestalt* psychology and various brands of formalism—including those of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, particularly important for Barnes—concurred to emphasize, analyze and formalize 'plastic' values. Certain formal reductions tended to geometric abstraction, for instance

24 On compositional diagrams, see: Rosenberg, 'Le schéma de composition,' 2008. **25** Itten, 'Analysen alter Meister,' 1921. **26** Benton, 'The Mechanics of Form Organization,' 1926–1927. **27** The arboretum had been created by a veteran of the Civil War, Joseph Lapsley Wilson, and was taken care of by Laura Leggett Barnes, the collector's wife, who organized the courses in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania. See: Watson, 'The Barnes Foundation. Part I,' 1923, p. 13; Dolkart, 'To See As the Artist Sees,'

the ‘analysis’ of a late medieval devotional picture, the *Adoration of the Magi* by Master Francke (1426, Kunsthalle Hamburg) drawn around 1920 by Johannes Itten, who was then teaching the ‘preliminary course’ at the Bauhaus.²⁵ But other drawings gave more value to the dynamics and complexities of organic form, for instance the diagrams illustrating Thomas Hart Benton’s ‘The Mechanics of Form Organization,’ published in 1926–1927 in *Arts Magazine* and meant as a step toward figural scenes, which must have been known to Barnes.²⁶

Barnes’s scientific training played a role in this and his approach could be called morphological rather than formalist. An often neglected aspect of his project—which the Foundation’s move to downtown Philadelphia marginalized even further—is the parallel he established between the study of artworks and that of plants, by building his museum on the site of an arboretum and organizing courses in horticulture, arboriculture and silviculture as well as in art appreciation.²⁷ In his letter to Davis, Barnes expressed a view of the ironwork informed by the biological theory of evolution: ‘Another point is that we can show how the objects of each pattern are direct descendants of what has gone before, but modified by new environment.’²⁸ In the ‘so-called useful arts,’ such a continuity was a matter of function, material and technique, and Barnes boasted of having ‘the best collection that shows the continuity of the traditions from the earliest times until creation stopped in America about 1830.’²⁹ But he saw and intended to demonstrate—in the face of widespread resistance against European modernism among the cultural elite of the United States—a similar continuity in the fine arts, adding to Davis that ‘that is just what we do with the paintings—that is, show how the modern painters are legitimate successors of the old masters.’³⁰

Blind Men v. Artists

In contrast to hand-drawn analyses, the ‘diagrams’ that Barnes used to illuminate the paintings were found ready-made. The implicit reference of such an observation to Marcel Duchamp is intentional: the ready-mades, with which Duchamp started experimenting in 1913, implied a transfer of agency from maker to viewer, since in order to ‘make’ one, the artist was content with selecting (and at times modifying slightly) an already existing object, and since promoting the result to the aesthetic status required the beholders’ assent and participation. During the affair surrounding Duchamp’s pseudonymous submission of *Fountain* to the jury of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917, his closest allies pointed to the analogies that the ceramic urinal, presented on the side, suggested to them with the shape of a Madonna or a Buddha.³¹ When Alfred Stieglitz photographed the object for

2012, p. 18. **28** Quoted after Wattenmaker, ‘In the Light of New Material,’ 2015, p. 33. **29** A. C. Barnes to Ch. F. Montgomery, 5 March 1948. Quoted after Wattenmaker, ‘In the Light of New Material,’ 2015, p. 25. **30** Quotes after Wattenmaker, ‘In the Light of New Material,’ 2015, p. 33. **31** See: Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp*, 1989.

Duchamp, he took pains to choose the setting and lighting so as to emphasize such associations: he created a shadow suggesting a veil and used as background a painting by Marsden Harley that redoubled the stupa-like shape and reinforced its connotations.³²

On the lawn in front of the main entrance to his galleries, Barnes installed a twentieth-century fire gong that Wattenmaker compares to David Smith's steel sculptures, and Duchamp's ready-mades include many everyday utensils, such as the *Bottle Dryer* (1914) and the snow shovel of *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915).³³ A significant difference between the wrought iron pieces collected and displayed by Barnes and Duchamp's ready-mades concerns the relative importance of craft: when he wrote 'until creation stopped in America about 1830,' Barnes limited the 'expression of experience' to manual work, whereas Duchamp focused on mass-produced items in which he found—as his posthumous notes revealed—an 'infra-thin' difference between objects 'stamped by the same mold.'³⁴ At a more generic level of intention, however, Barnes's and Duchamp's aims are related. The short-lived publication in which Duchamp's friends defended the cause of *Fountain* and of the ready-made was entitled *The Blind Man*, and the cover of its first issue showed a nude figure in a painting thumbing a nose at a passer-by led by a dog and holding a cane.³⁵ In accordance with Dewey, Barnes's main objective as a collector and a teacher was to overcome 'blindness' and to open people's eyes, help them 'to see as the artist sees.'³⁶ It can hardly be irrelevant in this context that Barnes owed his fortune to the discovery and marketing of Argylol, an antiseptic made of mild silver protein compounds used to prevent blindness in the newborn.³⁷

The maieutic function of Barnes's displays probably accounts for the fact that, although he explained his intentions regarding the inclusion of ironwork in a few private letters, he never advertised them or made them explicit for the visitors. As Wattenmaker summarizes, 'the wall ensembles elicited mixed reactions, ranging from scathing disapproval to mere perplexity to enthusiastic acceptance of the displays as works of art in their own right.'³⁸ The reactions depended to some extent on the degree to which their authors were apprised of Barnes's intentions, which was the case for instance of Owen J. Roberts, the attorney who had drawn up the Barnes Foundation indenture, when he wrote in advance of a visit: 'I join you in marveling that nobody has thought of integrating this work with other artistic and craft work because, as you say, the principles of art are the same no matter in what field they are exhibited.'³⁹

32 Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp*, 1989, pp. 33, 35–36 and 83. The painting is *Musical Theme (Oriental Symphony)* (1912–1913, Waltham, MA, Brandeis University, Rose Art Museum). **33** See: Wattenmaker, 'In the Light of New Material,' 2015, p. 30. **34** See: Duchamp, *Notes*, 1980, n° 35 (29 July 1937). **35** Roché (ed.), *The Blind Man*, 1917, cover. **36** See: Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 1925, pp. 5, 7 and 46. **37** See: Schack, *Art and Argylol*, 1966. **38** Wattenmaker, 'In the Light of New Material,' 2015, pp. 33–35. **39** O. J. Roberts to A. C. Barnes, 4 March 1937. Quoted after Wattenmaker, 'In the Light of New Material,' 2015, p. 30. **40** Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 1925, p. 7. **41** A. C. Barnes to J. Dewey, 29 and 30 March 1934, John Dewey Papers.

In his 1937 article, Dewey pleaded for arrangements based on ‘community of design’ in museums of decorative arts because they were meant for ‘artist-designers,’ who had to ‘learn to see for artistic purposes;’ in his preface to Barnes’s *The Art in Painting*, however, he wrote that there is ‘no essential difference in kind between the experience of the artist and that of the observer of his work.’⁴⁰ In a letter of 1934 to Dewey, Barnes mentioned a ‘Picasso’ that he had seen opposite his office, formed by snow on a stretch of roof, and concluded that there was ‘no difference in the essence of the aesthetic response in the two cases,’ one of them produced by ‘an artist of flesh and blood’—the real Picasso—and the other by God or ‘the combination of the forces of nature.’⁴¹ This is again close to Duchamp’s dictum that ‘it is the beholders who make the pictures’ and it must be observed that the ironwork displayed by Barnes, like the majority of Duchamp’s ready-mades, is not entirely ‘ready-made’ but was manipulated to produce the desired effect.⁴² Not only had many of these objects been separated—presumably by dealers and antiquaries rather than Barnes himself—from the pieces of furniture or architecture to which they had been attached, but they were also stripped of their colour—partly by Barnes—and often combined with each other. We saw that the metal analogon of Demuth’s *Masts* (Fig. 1) is formed by a hinge topped with a keyhole escutcheon; the element surmounting the centre of the West wall in Room 14, just above a small painting by Renoir (Fig. 5), is an assemblage combining (from top to bottom) a keyhole escutcheon, a hinge, a ring and a brace. The result cannot fail to be perceived as a mask or the image of a face and may be compared to Picasso’s *Bull’s Head* of 1942, assembled from the seat and handlebars of a bicycle.⁴³ In many cases, the relation between painting and ironwork has an element of playfulness and humour: on the West wall of Room 18, for example, a particularly ‘thorny’ ram’s-horn hinge looms above Renoir’s picture of *Roses* (c. 1912).⁴⁴

As is often the case with common names, the expression ‘ram’s-horn hinge’ attests to the existence of a collective, enduring iconic perception of the object. A close look at the pieces of wrought iron included by Barnes in his displays shows that he did not only discover in them echoes of paintings from his collection, but was also sensitive to iconic suggestions inherent in them, so that his juxtapositions may throw a light on both elements, the ironwork and the painting. A plate from Henri René d’Allemagne’s catalogue of the Musée Le Secq des Tournelles (Fig. 3) shows various degrees of anthropomorphic suggestion in keyhole escutcheons, including (at the centre of the bottom row) a touch of

Quoted after Meyers, *Art, Education, & African-American Culture*, 2004, pp. 187–188. ⁴² Schuster, ‘Marcel Duchamp, vite,’ 1957, pp. 143–145. Quoted after Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe*, 1975, pp. 247–248. ⁴³ See: Gamboni, *Potential Images*, 2002, pp. 214–218. ⁴⁴ Judith Dolkart notes correctly that ‘Barnes sometimes combined two or more disparate objects to create new silhouettes, to strengthen the formal connections between objects, and even to make jokes—some obvious, some subtle.’ (Cathelineau and Dolkart (eds.), *Strength and Splendor*, 2015, p. 7).

ribald humour with a nude halberdier rendered ithyphallic by the keyhole. Barnes would have noted such a visual pun, all the more as he had been interested in psychiatry since his medical studies and had criticized the Philadelphia psychiatrists, who tried to explain modern art as ‘degeneration,’ for ignoring ‘the monumental work done by Freud, Jung and Adler.’⁴⁵ His formalism was not opposed to semantics and an element of symbolism may be involved in his predilection for keys, keyholes and hinges, referring in cognitive as well as sexual terms to processes of encoding, decoding and connecting. The latter corresponds to display, which consists of modifying the perception and hence the meaning of objects by combining them in specific ways. It is telling that hinges also play an important role in collectors’ and artists’ museums such as the John Soane Museum in London and the Musée Gustave Moreau in Paris, where they help to increase the combinatorial density of the arrangements.⁴⁶ Like Soane and Moreau, Barnes became increasingly involved in such combinatorics, and the inclusion of ironwork and other craft objects corresponded to an interest in what he called the ‘transfer of values’ from one object to the next.⁴⁷

Wattenmaker points to the inspiration that Barnes derived from the writings on aesthetics of Paul Valéry, whom the collector tried to bring to the United States for a series of lectures.⁴⁸ A case in point is Valéry’s 1934 essay ‘On the Pre-eminent Dignity of the Arts of Fire,’ in which he praised wrought iron for the close connection between material, technique and form, as well as for the ‘noble uncertainty’ resulting from the agency of fire.⁴⁹ Another inspiring text may have been the marginal comments that Valéry added in 1930 to his 1894 ‘Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci,’ which defined the ‘usefulness of artists’ as the ‘preservation of sensory subtlety and instability’ and argued that ‘a work of art should always teach us that we had not seen what we are seeing.’⁵⁰ This is clearly the function that Barnes attributed to his ensembles and although he never

45 See: Meyers, *Art, Education, & African-American Culture*, 2004, pp. 61–63 and 69–73; Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, 2012, pp. 105–155 and 254–265. **46** See: Gamboni, “Musées d’auteur”, 2011, pp. 193–194, and Gamboni, *The Museum As Experience: Artists’ and Collectors’ Museums, a Dialogue* (forthcoming). **47** Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 1925, p. 6. On ‘transferred values,’ see: Bahr, ‘Transferring Values,’ unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Texas at Austin (1998); Johnson, ‘John Dewey’s Socially Instrumental Practice at the Barnes Foundation,’ 2012. **48** See: Wattenmaker, ‘In the Light of New Material,’ 2015, pp. 28–29. **49** Valéry, ‘De l’émminente dignité des arts du feu,’ 1934, pp. 7–12. **50** Valéry, *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci*, 1957, pp. 25 and 26. See: Dario Gamboni, ‘For a Science of the “Preservation of Sensory Subtlety and Instability”,’ 2008. **51** Ducasse, *Art, the Critics, and You*, 1944, p. 63. Quoted after Wattenmaker, ‘In the Light of New Material,’ 2015, p. 35. Ducasse was specialized in the philosophy of mind and aesthetics, and a review of this book, which argued for the value of the public’s insights, saw it as a ‘championship of the general consumer’ (Gilbert, ‘*Art, the Critics, and You*. By Curt J. Ducasse,’ 1945, p. 612). **52** See: Naumann and Obalk (eds.), *Affectionately, Marcel*, 2000, p. 179; Craig Adcock, “‘Falcon’ or “‘Perroquet’”? A Note on Duchamp’s *Morceaux choisis d’après Courbet*, *tout-fait*, 1/1 (Dec. 1999), www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_1/Notes/Faucon.html (last accessed 20 April 2018). **53** MacAgy (ed.), *The Western Round Table on Modern Art*, 1949, p. 66.

claimed to be an artist, one commentator—the philosopher Curt J. Ducasse—wrote in 1944 that ‘the works of decorative art these arrangements themselves constitute may well be ranked in aesthetic merit with some of the objects out of which they are composed.’⁵¹ To that extent, one can say that in Barnes’s displays and thanks to his promotion of the heuristic agency of objects, *ergon* became a shifting quality susceptible to scale and to exchanging positions with that of *parergon*.

Duchamp visited the Barnes Foundation on 3 December 1933, before the inclusion of ironwork, and he did not comment on what he had seen there, although his posthumous work *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* (1946–1966, Philadelphia Museum of Art) is clearly indebted to Courbet’s *Woman in White Stockings* (1864) hanging in Room 7.⁵² He may well have thought of Barnes, however, when he made, sixteen years later, a statement about the ‘real collector,’ whom he contrasted with the speculator: ‘he is, in my opinion, an artist—*au carré*. He selects paintings and puts them on his wall; in other words, “he paints himself a collection”.’⁵³

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Models, Functions and Meanings of the
Ironwork in Albert C. Barnes's Displays**

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part I, plate CIV (J. Schémit, 1924)

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