

THE HENRY CLAY FRICK FINE ARTS BUILDING

Its Significance to the University and to the City

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A new arts building is in process of construction for the city of Pittsburgh. It is to be known as the Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Building and will house the department known by that name at the University of Pittsburgh. Surely it is destined to be an ornament to the city and an important influence in its cultural activities for many years to come. Some years ago, before the numerous building activities which mark the new Pittsburgh, a few of us at the University felt that more emphasis should be given to the arts. The significance of the visual arts in the educational program had scarcely been touched, yet no other subject it would seem is so broad in its scope, involving as it does problems of science and history, religion, philosophy, and psychology. Dr. Bowman had a strong conviction of this and had established a department of fine arts in 1928. This was made possible through the generosity of Miss Helen C. Frick who has done so much for scholarship in the field of the arts in New York. She realized the local problems and the great importance of the undertaking here.

For some time the aims of the department, which were to consider the arts primarily as a reflection of man's cultural attainment during various periods of history, were not generally understood, but gradually special students became interested and have become established in important posts in widely scattered areas. We are represented on the staff of the National Gallery in Washington, at colleges in Vermont and Florida, Virginia, West Virginia and of course in our own state of Pennsylvania. One of our students is now teaching in Pakistan on a Fulbright grant. The present director of the Yale Art Gallery had his early training here and the head of the Tate Gallery in London was at one time an instructor in the department. Gradually a new awareness of the importance of the arts not only in education but to the general welfare of the city has developed.

And so Miss Frick through her great generosity has decided to go

An address by Walter R. Hovey, Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Professor, University of Pittsburgh, before the Society on Monday, October 28, 1963.—Ed.

ahead and build this new building. Whenever I think of the enthusiasm, the dedication, the idealism, and the wisdom of Miss Frick I become quite emotional. Perhaps I should not speak of this because it is obvious that Miss Frick does not care for public acclaim. Her concern is for the thing itself. I wish she were here this evening to tell us something of her ideals in connection with this very important development.

Naturally in a project of this sort there are many differences of opinion as to the best way to proceed. But the main issues are clear. We wish to establish a center for the visual arts which in its setting will be worthy of the great tradition of western art. Our approach, as is fitting in an institution dedicated to the humanities, is largely intellectual. We respect creativity as the rarest gift of the mind, and desire to recognize it and guide it. We believe that the deeper the understanding the richer the art, provided, of course, the original emotion is maintained. And so with high hopes we embark on an expanded program.

The first step in connection with the new building was to determine the site and from the beginning we felt that the area behind the fountain in the Schenley Plaza would be an ideal location. The original design for the Plaza had been drawn up in consultation with Frederick Olmstead who had inaugurated great park developments in many American cities but the project had never been completed. However, the formal arrangement which had been begun demanded an architectural terminus at the south end. Yet it should not obstruct the view across the valley into Schenley Park. Fortunately the land had been given to the city with the thought that it might be used for a public building. Since we wished this building to serve the public as well as the University students, the city council was cooperative. Certainly the beauty of the Plaza will be greatly enhanced.

The Renaissance style seemed most appropriate for an arts building as it was then that the visual arts flourished above all other forms of expression. It was then that the concept of beauty became an end in itself and artists never before nor since have been so interrelated with the most productive thought of the time whether science, history, philosophy, or religion. Furthermore, a simple Renaissance facade would be most in keeping with the Carnegie Library and the great mass of the adjacent Music Hall. Another factor favoring the Renaissance style was that it would make the most suitable setting for the Lochoff frescos which Miss Frick had purchased and which were to be an important part of the whole project. The design now calls

for a central court or cloister somewhat modelled after San Marco in Florence but also inspired by the cloister of Santa Maria Novella. This is extremely fitting for the Lochoff paintings are all reconstructions of some of the great works of the masters of early Italian painting.

Nicholas Lochoff was a Russian artist whom the Czar had sent to Florence to make copies of Italian paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for the Hermitage collections. This magnificent museum is rather lacking in works of this period. Cut off from Russia by the war and then by the overthrow of the government, Mr. Lochoff settled permanently in Italy and became an expert in the techniques of the old masters. He occasionally sold one of his copies, the Fogg Museum at Harvard has one, and his technique was so extraordinary that he attracted the attention of that great connoisseur of art, Bernard Berenson. It was through the recommendation of Berenson that Miss Frick purchased twenty-three of his works for Pittsburgh. Thus we shall have in the Lochoff Cloister of the new building examples of the work of Duccio and Giotto, Botticelli and Piero della Francesca, Giovanni Bellini and Carpaccio and others. That they will not have been touched by the hand of the original master is true but they will possess something of the creative spirit of the earlier epoch much as in Chinese painting a Sung copy of a lost T'ang original bespeaks the flavor of an earlier time. This cloister will be enclosed by glass but the inner court will be open to the sky and skillfully planted. The whole will make an ideal setting for contemplation and inspiration.

The entire building will embrace three distinct categories of interest, the library, the classrooms and exhibition space. Each of these must be thought of as separate units but each dependent and functioning in relation to the others. The library reading room will be two stories high surrounded by a balcony. It will contain the books most commonly in demand for classes and the contemporary periodical literature. The stack space adjoining will allow for some 100,000 volumes. Off from the reading room will be a photo-study room and off from the balcony a room for the storage and viewing of lantern slides. There will, of course, be carrels for special students. The function of the library must range from the most popular material on the visual arts to documents relating to involved research problems. While there is no program for publications comparable to that of the Hunt Botanical Library it is hoped that scholars coming to the University on Mellon grants or otherwise will find here material of importance for publication.

The teaching area will not only embrace studio space, offices, and classrooms, but a handsome lecture hall seating about two hundred.

The exhibition space apart from the Lochoff Cloister will contain two handsome period rooms, one Jacobean, the other eighteenth century French, a painting gallery, a gallery for changing exhibitions such as circulate among universities, a print room and incidental cases for displays of the decorative arts. Perhaps the most impressive room in the entire building will be an octagonal room some forty-five feet high in which an organ will be installed. This room will be a focal point from all directions. The four walls alternating with the four large doorways will make a handsome background for important paintings or even works of sculpture. As seen from the exterior this room will rise above the rest of the building and while it will not be seen at the main entrance it will give scale to the court and break the monotony of the rear facade.

As a building connected with professional training in the arts, space for small changing exhibitions is very important. Here is offered a kind of laboratory for the future museum director and often the nature of such exhibits is too specialized for general public interest in a large city museum. The record of past exhibitions held in the small seventh floor gallery of the Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Department is an impressive one. There, was shown for the first time the outstanding collection of portraits of botanists assembled by Rachel Hunt. The Hann collection of Russian icons was another memorable exhibition held in connection with a course in Russian art. There have been many exhibitions relating to the Pittsburgh scene: Pittsburgh and Its Rivers, Painting in Pittsburgh of the 19th Century, Pittsburgh Architecture. An exhibition of Persian Art as a source of inspiration to the arts of both the eastern and western worlds was outstanding as was an exhibition of calligraphy from the point of view of its aesthetic relationship to the other arts. Another important exhibition, perhaps the first of its kind to have been done anywhere, showed the history of enamelling. The reception given to these and numerous other displays on a given theme indicates their need and value.

Today the university without an extensive art collection is unusual and so the new building is a very important event for the University of Pittsburgh. Even more significant will be its role in the cultural life of the community. Interest in the arts is indeed a reflection of the values sought by every society. Certainly we owe a great debt of gratitude to Miss Frick who had the vision and wisdom to sponsor this project.