an *anti*-catalog

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$3.50

AMERICAN ART

An Exhibition from the Collection of
Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd

an *anti*-catalog

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The Catalog Committee of
Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, 1977
106 East 19th Street, #4
New York, N.Y., 10003

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Published by
The Catalog Committee, Inc.
New York, 1977.

Further copies available from
The Catalog Committee, Inc.,
106 East 19th Street, #4,
New York, N.Y. 10003.
Price $3.50 plus 50¢ handling.

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The Project

The decision by the Whitney Museum to show the private collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III as one of its four Bicentennial shows came at a crucial moment for the community of artists in New York. For some time, many artists and others working in art-related fields had become increasingly aware that the meaning and real worth of their activities were directed and controlled by the market and its legitimatizing institutions, of which museums are a major part. The announced intention of the Whitney and the de Young Museum in San Francisco to sponsor the showing of the Rockefeller collection as an exhibition of "American Art" seemed to many of us a particularly outrageous and blatant abuse of community trust by publicly funded museums. Meetings were called in the art community to discuss this specific outrage, as well as the more general issue of the use (or more aptly the *misuse)* of art and art institutions to serve the interests of a wealthy minority sector of the population at the expense of the majority. Some of us, who had felt that good art couldn't be "political," were faced with the realization that our institutions were politicizing our work *for* us, and more importantly: those "politics" were against our interests.

These meetings, now known as Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, have been held on a weekly basis for over a year, with attendance usually around eighty. Part of the role of AMCC has been to provide a forum for the examination of the political nature of culture—how it is used, how it uses us. An equally important role, however, has been to focus attention on the very political behaviour of our supposedly "neutral" institutions, the Whitney being a case in point. To this end, AMCC carried out several protest demonstrations at the Whitney: first, a protest against the proposed showing of the Rockefeller collection; then a call for a boycott, after our pleas were ignored and "American Art, An Exhibition from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III" opened on September 16, 1976.

The decision by AMCC to protest the Rockefeller show (both with the boycott and this Anti-catalog) was not predicated on the assumption that this show represented a unique phenomenon—simply "an unfortunate misjudgement" on the part of the Museum's curatorial staff—but rather on the growing awareness that such "misjudgements" only permit us a slightly more direct insight into the social power relations underlying the organization of what we commonly experience as official culture. For this purpose the Rockefeller show has been our consistent point of focus, although our perspective relates to issues which go far beyond the specific scope of this exhibition.

We have called our publication an *anti*-catalog because it does not exist as a catalog of omissions, an attempt to fill in the gaps in Rockefeller's view—but rather it opposes the very legitimacy of that view in its monopoly of the means of cultural definition. Unlike most catalogs, it is not a listing of valuable objects or a definitive statement of what is or is not significant art. This Anti-catalog does not attempt to be authoritative, but to call into question the very notion of "authoritative" views of culture.

This Anti-catalog has been conceived, written, and produced as a collective project of the Catalog Committee of AMCC. It has been shaped by many people and many points of view. But as varied as those views are, we share the belief that culture should no longer exist merely as an extension of the economic interests or the personal "tastes" of the wealthy and powerful. Nor can we hope to transform culture outside of a struggle to transform the society from which it springs. One aspect of the attempt to reappropriate culture, however, is the reappropriation of the meanings which we give to the things and phenomena in our environment. This Anti-catalog is an attempt to come to grips with the meaning of a Bicentennial exhibition perhaps all too aptly entitled, "American Art, An Exhibition from Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III."

A Statement

The neutrality of art is something we usually take for granted. Art, and the institutions that exhibit art—so we have been led to assume—have nothing to do with social or political issues. We experience exhibitions, like the exhibition of the Rockefeller collection, mainly in terms of the individual works displayed and we react according to our preferences. Yet exhibitions result from a process of selection, and the selections that lead to the assembling of a collection or the mounting of an exhibition are of necessity based upon beliefs about art and the world art reflects. Thus an exhibition, seen as a whole, embodies a point of view. But because we are asked to believe in the neutrality of art, that point of view usually goes unnoticed. Yet even a summary overview of an exhibition often reveals an underlying bias. In the case of the Rockefeller collection, "American art" turns out to be almost exclusively the work of white male artists. The collection contains not a single work by a Hispanic or native American and only one work by a woman artist and one work by a Black. These omissions (and they are only the most obvious) reflect a specific outlook—an outlook that is hardly neutral.

There are those who argue that John D. Rockefeller III has the right to collect whatever he wishes. But Rockefeller's freedom to collect (or the reason he enjoys that freedom) is not the immediate issue. A private collection is, conceivably, a private matter. But when it is presented at an institution such as the Whitney Museum, the collection enters the public realm. Here, the owner's apparently personal outlook and prejudices take on the force of a polemic. The exhibition of the Rockefeller collection is, in effect, a public argument—an argument made all the more powerful by its seeming neutrality—for the Rockefeller view of history and the Rockefeller view of art.

The bias the Rockefeller show exemplifies is not simply the bias of an individual sensibility or outlook. Rather it reflects the class bias inherent in the institutions of "official" culture. These institutions—the Whitney, the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, etc.—are controlled by a corporate-government elite. Consciously and unconsciously, this elite uses its control of official culture to make art serve its own interests.

It would be wrong to believe that art, as we have been accustomed to conceive of it, and the institutions that exhibit art exist independently of one another; that art is defined by intrinsic formal properties and that museums exhibit whatever happens to be the best art. The fact is the reverse. Offical culture, through its monopoly of cultural institutions, defines what is and what is not art. It does this by conferring institutional legitimacy. This process of legitimatizing art ultimately functions ideologically. Via the institutions of official culture, the corporate-government elite projects an image of the past that justifies the present social order and its unequal divisions of wealth and power. In this manner, as the Rockefeller collection so clearly illustrates, history is portrayed as solely the work of the wealthy and powerful. Their visibility in art is predicated upon the invisibility and implied powerlessness of the majority. Official culture thus raises the inequalities of the present social system to the level of eternal law. Under the cover of the neutrality of art, official culture certifies the claim to power of those who now possess it.

Because it calls the neutrality of art into question, this Anti-catalog will be seen as a political statement. It is, in reality, no more political than the viewpoint of official culture. The singularity of that viewpoint—the way it advances the interests of a class—is difficult to see because in our society that viewpoint is so pervasive. In this Anti-catalog, we have attempted to elucidate some of the underlying mechanisms and assumptions. Our effort is not intended simply as a critical exercise. Culture has the power to shape not only our view of the past but also the way we see ourselves today. Official culture can only diminish our ability to understand the world and to act upon that understanding. The critical examination of culture is thus a necessary step in gaining control over the meaning we give our lives.

Mr. Catlin and Mr. Rockefeller Tame the Wilderness

When the Europeans first came to North America they found an untamed wilderness inhabited only by a few primitive but noble savages. Those savages, called Indians, lived in nature almost like animals. They melted away when confronted by civilization, technology, and progress.

Many people in the United States would not find too much wrong with the above paragraph. The truth, I think, will surprise most people: When Columbus first landed in the "New World" there were between twenty and thirty-five *million* people living in what is now the U.S. (and around one hundred million in the North American continent). Those people had been living here for at least 70,000 years, which is to say, longer than people have inhabited Western Europe. They were divided into nations, most of which had basically farming cultures which developed most of the foods that we eat today. The standard of living of the average American Indian was much higher and more advanced than that of the average European until well into the nineteenth century. For example, there were five different methods of chemical (herbal) birth-control for women; there were no bosses, jails, or poor people, and no unemployment. Medicine was in general more highly developed than it was in Europe, as were agriculture and political systems.

But the myths which portray us as primitive savages were necessary for the purpose of making the European immigrants do the dirty work of "Western Expansion" (colonization and genocide) for the rich landowners and land speculators of U.S. history. By the time the original thirteen colonies were formed, all of the farmable land in them was owned by a tiny minority of land-owners, so that new immigrants were forced to move further west. The land further west, however, belonged to other people—Indians.

Art, from "high art" to illustrations in penny-dreadful novels, was one of the major tools the bosses used to further the mythology they invented to fool the people into believing that the "savage" Indians had no right to the land. That continues today in Hollywood films; the mythology is so well-developed that the essence of "Americanism" is the concept of taming the wilderness and conquering the frontier, which means genocide to Indians. Who is served by such imperialistic dreams? The majority of those immigrants who were forced west did not benefit from the land they took. Their descendants do not benefit now. The good land and the resources are still in the hands of a small minority whose power rests partly in their ability to maintain the myths their forefathers invented—in their ability to fool people.

George Catlin is well-known as a portrayer of Indians. One of his paintings in Mr. Rockefeller's bicentennial advertisement for the American myth shows a group of plains Indians fleeing a prairie fire. The clear message is that those poor Indians were enslaved to the whims of nature, unlike civilized folk. The subliminal message is that Europeans would sweep the continent and relentlessly drive all others out.

Most of Catlin's Indian paintings are portraits of Indian men looking stoical. He had the idea, as many did, that we were "vanishing" and he wanted to record some of our noble savage faces. Thus he is vaguely known as a friend of the Indians. (As it turned out we didn't vanish and we're still fighting.) Imagine a German painter during the Third Reich painting the noble faces of condemned Jews for the edification and admiration of Europe.

But it is fitting that the Rockefellers have collected Catlin's work. The history of that family is also a history of oppression of Indians, and the Rockefellers need to keep up their own silly version of U.S. history by every means possible. The first source of Rockefeller money is oil. The oil industry began in Oklahoma, the territory where many Indian nations were crowded onto barren tracts of land, and where poor white farmers, forced to move from the deep South by unbearable economic conditions, were once again placed in confrontation with Indians at the turn of this century. (In the 1920's and '30's they were forced further west again, into California.)

The oil companies stole land that legally and morally belonged to Indians. They did it by fraud, terror, and murder, just as they are now doing it in New Mexico, South Dakota and Montana.

Indian people never got one dime for their oil. We get poorer, Mr. Rockefeller gets richer, and some artists continue to glorify that ugly history.

Indian Art

"Prairie Fire" by Blackbear Bosin, Philbrook Art Center

Collections of "American art" seldom show works by American Indians. The assumption is that we produce anthropological artifacts—art is made by white people. According to what "art" means today that is true, in that Indians do not use art as a consumer product nor to enhance the status of a class of people.

The Kiowa artist Blackbear Bosin has repainted George Catlin's prairie fire scene from an Indian interpretation. In Bosin's painting the fire takes on real importance but is not shown as an uncontrollable force. Bosin portrays the Indian sense of wonder and admiration at the forces of nature. The humans are not helpless before it; neither are they the same as nor isolated from the other animals. The Indian riders are kin to the fire in the sky and kin to the antelope. The painting gives a sense of a terrible yet beautiful dance wherein even opposing forces can be tuned together by human action.

That sense of showing the order of seemingly un-ordered events, and using the tensions of those events can be seen in all Indian art. The Crow Indian painting made last century of a successful rout of an invading army of the U.S. government gives a design and order to an outwardly chaotic battle.

The Crow are victorious in that battle, which may be taken as prophecy, Mr. Rockefeller.

Crow Muslin pictograph

Demystifying American Art

A gallery of paintings—paintings created hundreds of years ago. What value can these paintings have for us now?

According to the history of art that is habitually taught, past art should be seen in its historical context: to understand baroque art we must study the baroque period; to understand ancient Greek art we must study the ancient Greeks.

Yet the art of the past embodies a contradiction which makes such an approach one-sided: past art belongs to history but it also belongs to the present. (The present includes our present-day needs and aspirations, characteristic beliefs about art, the institutions that govern the way art is owned, exhibited, publicized, etc.)

If we could see it simultaneously in history and in the present, the art of the past could enlarge our experience and deepen our sense of historical possibility. However, in our society art is subject to a characteristic mystification—a mystification that severs the connection between art's historical origins and its contemporary existence. Past art is treated as if it still existed in the past. This is, paradoxically, its chief contemporary meaning.

Because of its connections with America's past, American art suffers a double mystification. Not only is it projected into a past sealed off from the present; it also is used to support a mythic version of American history. Of course American art has often directly contributed to the making of patriotic myths.

Leutze, Washington Crossing the Delaware, *1851*

But art devoid of mythic overtones can also be subjected to this type of mystification.

The mythic history of America, like other patriotic myths (for example, the now defunct myth of the British Empire) is premised upon a belief in the country's essential goodness. As with all matters of faith, this belief is not open to question: either you are patriotic and believe in America or you are Unamerican.

Of course almost no one takes the myth at face value. Its corniness is generally disparaged. Yet to an extent that is rarely recognized the myth continues to shape the way we look at American history and the American present. Even a tacit reference to the myth is at times thought sufficient to silence any doubts about America. For example, E.P. Richardson writes:

"The atmosphere of the decade [the 1920's] was dominated by expatriates. A group of writers living in Paris if they could (if not at least in New York), and filled with ardor from the backwash of the 1914 war, proclaimed that the United

States had no soul and that life there stifled the human spirit. (Any resemblance to the 1960's may illustrate that those who know no history are doomed to repeat it.)

"Burchfield cannot be said to have contradicted these expatriates because there is no evidence he gave them a moment's thought."[1]

Mythic treatment transforms the past into a roll call of famous leaders and events: Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, the Declaration of Independence, Valley Forge, the War of 1812, etc. The myth thus becomes a way of ignoring large areas of actual history. It eliminates from history any sense of lived experience—the contradictions and struggles that make up experience. Instead it pictures an American past free of real tensions—a past overflowing with triumphs (especially military triumphs) and material progress. Such persistent features of America's history as exploitation, racism, slavery, injustice, discrimination, inequality, genocide are forgotten or treated as if they were uncharacteristic.

The patriotic myth survives despite all that is known about the realities of America's past. It survives because it serves to affirm and justify the present social system as it is. The myth provides a historical rationale for today's corporate-government elite. And by ignoring or minimizing the reality of past social conflicts, it helps make today's conflicts appear unimportant—exceptions, somehow, to America's usual goodness.

Because of its irrationality, the myth can be perpetuated only through repeated appeals to emotion. The reiteration of patriotic symbols and ceremonies—flags, American eagles, Fourth of July, Washington's Birthday, Yankee Doodle, etc.—constitutes a type of conditioning. Art, because it works on the emotions, can be a powerful means of reinforcement.

For example, the sight of a portrait from the Colonial period (the period most often subjected to mythic treatment) evokes, almost reflexively, a host of patriotic associations.

An Exhibition from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd

But what, in fact, underlies these associations? A gallery of eighteenth and nineteenth century portraits implies that our cultural heritage consists of the historical continuity of the ruling class.

Similarly, images of a departed ruling class are frequently used to certify the authority of today's corporate-government elite.

Cover of Smithsonian, *April 1976.*

1. E.P. Richardson, *American Art, A Narrative and Critical Catalogue*, San Francisco (The Fine Arts Museums), 1976, p. 222.

The art historical literature devoted to early American portraiture is filled with nostalgia for the presumed gentility of Colonial society. Consider, for example, E.P. Richardson's descriptions of two Copley portraits:

"Copley won his first success as a painter of elegance. The people of his time lived by a formal code of manners; their dress was stately and beautiful; their idea of portraiture, shared by artist and sitters alike, was formed by the works of English painters like Hudson and Highmore. But in the 1760's a new tone emerged in the English portraits shown in the print shops of Boston. In this New Wave men were posed with greater

Mrs. Sargent, *1763*

ease and naturalness while women's portraits became lighter, gayer, and showed touches of charming artifice. Copley responded in such a portrait as that of *Mrs. Daniel Sargent.*[2]

William Vassal and his son Leonard, *ca. 1770-72*

". . . The two heads show Copley's grasp of character: the elder grave, worn and attentive; the boy's face, still touched with childish softness, puzzled and appealing.

"John Adams later described William Vassal as 'one of my old friends and clients, a mandamus counsellor against his will, a man of letters and virtues, without one vice that I ever knew or suspected, except garrulity.' He was a man with whom Copley could sympathize, for like the artist he had no interest in the darkening scene of Massachusetts politics except to stay out of it. A man made wealthy by his sugar plantations in Jamaica, owner of large properties in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, he lived in a house on Pemberton Hill commanding a splendid view over Boston Harbor, with terraced gardens descending to the road below. Neither a merchant nor office holder, neither Whig nor Tory, he was a man of leisure who wished no part in the quarrel with the mother country. But in time of revolution the neutral is often a victim. After the riots of 1774 in Boston, the Vassal family, attempting to take refuge on their Rhode Island county [*sic*] place 'were pelted by the mob in Bristol, to the endangering of their lives.' They returned to Boston but as soon as possible after Lexington hired a ship and went first to Nantucket, then to England."[3]

These descriptions exemplify a characteristic bias.

Colonial society—in which only a tiny percentage of the population could afford "charming artifice"—was rife with class antagonism. The opening acts of rebellion, which occurred about the time these portraits were painted, often took the form of popular outbursts against privilege and property—outbursts which made John Adams in 1776 dread "the Effect so popular a pamphlet" as Tom Paine's *Common Sense* "might have, among the People."[4] It is also worth mentioning, precisely because it is here so typically forgotten, that it was the unspeakably ruthless exploitation of slave labor that allowed William Vassal, whom Richardson portrays as a victim, to spend his life as a man of leisure.

2. Richardson, p. 38.

3. Richardson, p. 40.

4. Cited in Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution from the Bottom Up," in Barton J. Bernstein ed., *Towards A New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, New York, 1969, p. 10.

Mrs. Goldthwait

Reverend Thomas Carey

Thomas Flucker

Yet if we understand what part of society we are seeing and how we are seeing it, Copley's portraits offer us the possibility of knowing something about life in Colonial America.

Copley was the son of the owner of a Long Wharf tobacco shop. His career, which began at the age of fifteen, made him wealthy and wealth made him the social equal of Boston's merchant elite. His paintings, despite the frequent claim of great insight into character, exhibit little psychological sensitivity. Copley comprehended in his sitters what he knew in himself: concentrated ambition, hard-headed calculation, pride in professional achievement (the half-smile so many of his sitters wear), an aloof and appraising attitude of the sort that accompanies unassailable social status.

What especially distinguishes Copley's paintings from other Colonial portraits is their unabashed materialism—a materialism which is expressed through a highly convincing rendition of texture. In Copley's paintings, faces and hands are often simplified, reduced almost to still life, while clothes and artifacts seem to come alive. These paintings express an obsessive fascination with things that can be possessed: silk, velvet, brocade, damask, lace, pewter, silver, brilliantly polished furniture. Even the paintings themselves, in the way they picture the world, are a type of possessing. Copley's style reflects the materialism of his sitters and the values of the society over which they presided: a penny-pinching, compulsively acquisitive society in which almost anything could be reduced to a monetary value.

Mrs. Jeremiah Lee

Paul Revere

It is for this reason that Copley's imitations of British fancy-dress portraiture look so incongruous while his more realistic paintings appear entirely true to their subjects.

There is an additional way in which art's potential for meaning is diminished. This can best be illustrated first by example. Look for a moment at the reproduction of Thomas Anshutz's *Ironworkers—Noontime* of 1881 and then consider the two statements printed below.

1. Anshutz painted this scene of workers at a Wheeling West Virginia iron mill at a time of tremendous industrial expansion and working class struggle. In 1877 there was a nationwide railroad strike which became known as the Great Upheaval. At its center in Pittsburgh the National Guard shot twenty workers. Thousands of strikers retaliated by destroying the Pennsylvania railroad yards including eleven-and-a-half miles of rolling stock. In 1886 there were almost 1500 strikes involving a half million workers. The May Day Movement—the culminating struggle for the eight hour day—led to the Haymarket riot of May 4 in which the explosion of a bomb killing seven policemen resulted in a wave of police repression and the judicial lynching of four anarchists.

2. Anshutz encountered great difficulty selling *Ironworkers—Noontime.* Finally, as a favor to the artist, a collector named Thomas Clarke purchased it. Clarke eventually grew bored with the painting and in 1899 sold it for $150. In 1973, Howard Garfinkle bought *Ironworkers—Noontime* for $250,000, at the time the highest price ever paid for an American painting. John D. Rockefeller III, its present owner, may have paid as much as $500,000.[5]

The first statement indicates some of the ways in which the painting might become meaningful to us: as a reflection of history and therefore as a way of understanding history; as an instance of the way a particular artist—in this case an artist inspired by the idea of socialism—saw the world.

The second statement is, in a sense, a negation of the first. Monetary value transforms the painting into something awesome: not because of what it is but because of what it has come to represent.

It is often claimed that art embodies "spiritual" values, that the realm of culture is the antithesis of the banal materialism of daily life. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, speaks for a host of museum heads and art bureaucrats:

"American art today is preeminent in the world. The best of our artists preserve the tradition of the rigorous and idealistic search for truth and unity. Whether understood or not, there is a sense of spiritual dedication in the plastic arts as surely as in the poet's quest. Much of our life today is full of dross, our ideals tarnished with shabby and venal thoughts. For my part I am thankful that the Smithsonian has finally accepted a measure of its inherent responsibilities, and that in so doing we may advance the cause of art . . ."[6]

Works of art are frequently used to lend an aura of refinement and culture. In fact, they testify to the realities of wealth and power. What they embody as works of art is, in the end, irrelevant.

5. The information about Anshutz and *Ironworkers—Noontime* is derived from Ruth Bowman, "Nature, The Photograph and Thomas Anshutz," *Art Journal*, Fall, 1973, pp. 32-40; Sandra Denney Heard, *Thomas P. Anshutz*, Exhibition Catalogue, Philadelphia, 1973; Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., "Ironworkers Noontime," *American Art Review*, Jan-Feb., 1974, pp. 39-46.

6. S. Dillon Ripley, "The view from the castle," *Smithsonian*, April, 1976, p. 6.

Palm Springs, Calif., July 11—Under a fabulous Seurat and flanked by a priceless Gauguin and an even more priceless—if possible — Van Gogh, Frank Sinatra married Barbara Marx this afternoon at Sunnylands, the unbelievably magnificent 1,000-acre Palm Springs oasis of former Ambassador Walter Annenberg.

Outside it was 120 in the shade, and humid, too. Inside it was a luxuriously perfumed 68 degrees—the air filled with the scent of thousands of gardenias, white roses, white chrysanthemums and white

Suzy Says

orchids from the Annenberg greenhouses. The strains of the piano playing "True Love" also filled the air. The scene was right out of "High Society," one of Frank's big movie hits, only better.

Barbara and Frank were married by Judge James H. Walsworth in the wedding of the year — at least — in front of the black marble, gardenia-festooned, fern-filled fireplace in the huge treasure trove that is the Annenberg drawing room. Two exquisite Cloisonne cranes with flowers in their beaks perched on either side of the fireplace banked by gardenia trees.

In the bower the bride was blonde and beautiful and very happy in a drifting beige chiffon by Halston. The groom wore a beige silk and linen suit, a beige silk tie and a brown and beige hanky in his breast pocket. He was tan and trim and very happy.

Freeman Gosden was Frank's best man, and Bea Korshak was Barbara's matron of honor. Bea wore her present from Frank and Barbara, a long, antique sapphire and diamond chain.

Despite the ideology of "spiritual values," the commodity nature of art constantly reasserts itself.

For example, a painting like Anshutz's *Ironworkers—Noontime* could be exhibited with reproductions of paintings, prints, photographs. Such an exhibition might enhance the painting's meanings and suggest new meanings. Yet almost without exception, works of art are exhibited with little or no historical information and no auxilliary images. They are exhibited like goods in a store window, unrelated save for the fact they are all commodities of a similar kind.

The label that appears on the wall next to the painting certifies the painting's authenticity and lists its physical attributes. The label testifies to the work's existence as a unique and hence highly valuable commodity.

8. Thomas P. Anshutz
Ironworkers--Noontime c. 1880-82
Oil on canvas, 17 x 24 inches
Signed lower left: Thos Anshutz

Similarly, art catalogues often bear a marked resemblance to other types of commodity catalogues. Although they may contain useful information, their primary purpose is to affirm the commodity nature of individual works and entire collections. Thus despite all imaginative possibilities, catalogues generally conform to the same repetitious format—a format in which each work is reproduced and discussed in isolation.

We began this section by drawing a distinction between art as a repository of potential meanings and art as a commodity. In the art historical literature, however, the two categories are usually hopelessly confounded. Meaning is equated with judgments about artistic quality. And in our society quality is an issue that is finally settled in the art market.

In its way, the Rockefeller collection catalogue is an extraordinary case in point. The collection was assembled with unlimited funds. In theory, the quality of the works should be beyond dispute. The author of the catalogue was free to pursue any subject he wished. Yet his primary task, as he conceived it, was furnishing testimonials to artistic quality.

"Mr. Rockefeller acquired these portraits in 1967 as characteristic works of Benbridge, and the exhibition of his work at the National Portrait Gallery in 1971 made it clear that they are among his finest works."

"Copley never painted better than in this portrait [of Mrs. Sargent]. . . . Copley for the first time had hit his stride."

"The [Audubon] drawing is a study for one of the squirrels in plate XLVIII, and as Herrick noted, the squirrel plates are equal to his finest earlier works."

". . . this painting of the drama of a prairie fire is Catlin at his best."

"This *Peaceable Kingdom* [as opposed to the eighty or more others by Hicks] is especially rich in imagery."

". . . These varied paths along which the imagination leads one into the picture, the majestic trees that Durand loved to paint, the changing forms of earth, water and sky all within a fine aerial unity, these show Durand's calm poetry at its best."

"Heade painted many times the effect of light over water or over marshes as the sun slips below the horizon. But he never caught that moment with greater effect than in this painting."

". . . certainly Heade never painted light and silence in a more moving way."

"This is one of the finest paintings [Lane] ever did."

"[Page's *Flight into Egypt*] is an exceptional picture in its composition, its deep shadowy tone, its grave mood."

"[Chase] painted [Shinnecock] many times—never better than here."

". . . it is one of the least familiar of [Homer's] wartime pictures. It is also one of his most interesting and original."

Today, a nineteenth century depiction of industrial workers is the centerpiece of a billionaire's collection of American art. Had Anshutz gone on to paint other works in a similar vein, *Ironworkers—Noontime* would be less valuable as a commodity. Critics would speak of it as "early" and "immature." They would more readily point out its flaws. But *Ironworkers—Noontime* is unique. The reasons for its uniqueness are, in a number of ways, revealing.

Anshutz's painting, despite limitations which should not be overlooked, recognizes the workers simultaneously as individuals and as members of a class. Unlike the handful of earlier American paintings of industry, it neither stereotypes nor condescends. Rather it suggests a strength and a capacity for autonomy (expressed through the independent movement of the figures) which is directly linked with the subject.

Although this is a painting of workers seen as individuals, the artist sees them—their lives, their experience—from the outside. Anshutz was limited, in part, by an academic tradition. (This also accounts for the somewhat stilted monumentality of the composition.) With the artistic means available to him he could not record experience in subjective terms. (In this respect, it is perhaps significant he did not attempt to portray the labor process.) Rather Anshutz equated artistic truth with scientific objectivity. Thus he believed that scientific means—anatomy, perspective, photography—were necessary to confirm the reality of what he painted.

This belief in the applicability of science to art Anshutz inherited from his teacher, Thomas Eakins. Eakins subscribed to a typically nineteenth century belief in the existence of an objectively verifiable visual reality. What distinguished

him, however, from his academic contemporaries was his willingness to carry that belief to its logical conclusion. The unsparing psychological realism of his portraits cost him commissions. His insistence upon the facts of anatomy finally cost him his job at the Pennsylvania Academy. (In 1886, while demonstrating the origin of a leg muscle, he removed the loin cloth from a male model in front of a class of woman students.[7]) For Eakins, visual truth took precedence over everything else. But he understood from bitter experience that the sort of visual truth his art conveyed was incompatible with conventional patronage and criticism. For confirmation of his abilities he often looked elsewhere. Walt Whitman wrote: "the people who like Eakins are the people who have no art prejudices to interpose."[8] And Eakins commented: "the working people, from their close contact with physical things, are apt to be more acute critics of pictures than the dilettanti themselves, and might justly resent patronage."[9]

The historical evidence now available suggests only that Eakins taught Anshutz artistic technique. Yet it is difficult to resist the idea that Eakins' teachings (as well as his identification with working people) may have helped prompt Anshutz's socialism. A belief in science was characteristic of socialist thinking in the late nineteenth century. Popular socialist philosophy was then often premised on the idea (somewhat naive and mechanical by later marxist standards) that most areas of knowledge and human endeavor are susceptible to scientific method.

Thus in the way it represents the world as well as in its subject, *Ironworkers—Noontime* must be considered a socialist work. What do we mean by this, that it is a socialist work? Here we have to be especially careful to avoid misinterpretation. We are not saying that socialist art automatically results whenever workers are portrayed in a realist style. Nor are we saying that *Ironworkers—Noontime* exemplifies "socialist realism." What we mean by socialist is that *Ironworkers—Noontime* expresses visually the sense of a socialist outlook that was current in America in the late nineteenth century.

That Anshutz's painting is today an emblem of extraordinary wealth is in large measure possible because its historical significance has been effectively neutralized. The literature that deals with *Ironworkers—Noontime* relates it to the immediate concerns of Anshutz's career and to a closed system of art historical references.

"It is said of the sculptor Flaxman that when asked where he found the handsome figures and poses depicted in his illustrations to Homer, he replied, 'In the streets of London.' Thomas Eakins, Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer, sensitive as they were to the painter's vision of light and space, to time and weather and human feelings, also looked at the people around them and saw the human figure as sculpture. It is one of their great merits.

"Anshutz was a pupil of Eakins and absorbed his lessons. At least once in this picture, almost his first independent composition, he did something that neither Eakins or Homer could or did do [*sic*]. While visiting his family's old home at Wheeling, West Virginia, he saw pictorial possibilities in an iron foundry and in the men on whose strong muscles the production of iron was dependent in those days. He made careful studies of both men and the foundry before painting this scene of muscular figures relaxing in the noon day sun. The frieze-like design, the rich but sober color, the contrasts of light and dark emphasize its monumentality. American artists in the nineteenth century painted few pictures of industry. This may well be the most important.

"It was bought in 1883 by Thomas B. Clarke, one of the best collectors of American art at that time, and engraved by Frederick Juengling for *Harper's Weekly* (August 30, 1884). But it is said that the artist felt there was no interest in pictures of this sort, and he never painted this type of subject again."[10]

7. Even today, some art historians wish to forget the reasons for Eakins' firing. E.P. Richardson, p. 156, writes: "He taught painting and lectured on anatomy at the Academy until 1886, when a disagreement on policy forced his resignation." By contrast, Eakins said: "respectability in art is appalling." (Cited in Fairfield Porter, *Thomas Eakins*, New York, 1959, p. 22.)

8. Quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, New York, 1933, p. 123.

9. Cited in Louis Mumford, *The Brown Decades*, New York, 1931, p. 216.

10. Richardson, p. 138.

Anshutz's motives, even his belief in socialism, have been assimilated to a sentimental and condescending humanitarianism. The author of what is the most complete catalogue to date of Anshutz's paintings has this to say of Anshutz's socialism:

"Politically, Anshutz was a socialist—a term from which we should dissociate the unsavory connotations brought on by the years separating us from him. His socialism, like that of his pupil John Sloan, stemmed from love for and trust in humanity rather than from hatred of a capitalistic society."[11]

This is to propose a false antithesis. Socialism has meant many things; but if it means anything at all it means a recognition of the historical need for doing away with capitalism. This constitues its "unsavory connotations."

In its subject and, to an extent, in its style, *Ironworkers—Noontime* went against the grain of American taste. This is, in brief, the reason Anshutz never painted a sequel. But taste itself is often an ideological force—a force that works via selection. The way Anshutz was affected by the taste of his contemporaries is a demonstration of the way taste operates ideologically.

Anshutz probably expected that the painting, which is now called his "masterpiece" and on which he expended an extraordinary effort, would make his reputation. The expectation was naive in a way that corresponds to the historical naiveté of his age—an age in which large-scale industrial capitalism was a new phenomenon in America and its existence still the subject of public debate. Anshutz's naiveté can be gauged by the extent of his disappointment. The painting was poorly received when placed on exhibition and failed to find a buyer. Anshutz is reported to have been so discouraged that he considered painting over the composition. Later, after the painting had been sold, he was even further discouraged when the Strobridge Lithographic company pirated his composition for an Ivory Soap advertisement.[12]

The advertisement trivialized Anshutz's painting by reducing the workers to cheerful consumers of the advertised product.

Due to a lack of supporting interest Anshutz never returned to painting scenes of working class life. Of course in theory an artist could paint whatever he or she wished. But save for the most persevering artists, a lack of interest—even assuming some sort of material support—is equivalent to slow starvation. It is for this reason that there were so few high art portrayals of the theme of worker and workplace. The small number that do exist often seem either tentative or needlessly romantic.

Weir, Forging the Shaft, *1877*

Homer, The Morning Bell, *1866*

11. Heard, p. 21.
12. Bowman, p. 32; Heard, pp. 7f.

Koehler, The Strike, *1886*

Patrons preferred genre paintings based upon a self-serving lie. The lie was that the world, which had made a few wealthy, is happy and free of conflict. The genre paintings portrayed the poor as pious and content, ragged newsboys as picturesque, blacks as cheerful and lazy, etc.

Hovenden, The Old Version, *1881*

J.G. Brown, A Tough Story, *1886*

E. Johnson, Old Kentucky Home, *1859*

Hovenden, Man Smoking a Pipe

Workers, when they appear, are used nostalgically to evoke a pre-industrial era.

Sargent, Oyster Gatherer, *1877*

Chalfant, The Old Clockmaker, *1899*

Chalfant's painting incorporates a characteristically bathetic anecdote: time has made the clockmaker old. But in 1899, when Chalfant painted, clock factories had displaced clockmakers. The painting is, in this sense, disingenuous not only in what it shows but also in what it omits.

To a degree far greater than is now realized, late nineteenth century American painting was devoted to sustaining the illusions of well-to-do patrons. Genre paintings often were hung with works calculated to flatter the patrons' mores and life styles. To make the flattery they contained more convincing, the paintings often incorporated a careful visual realism.

Sargent, Caroline de Bassano, Marquise d'Espeuilles, *1884*

E. Johnson, The Brown Family, *1869*

These paintings so thoroughly catered to contemporary taste that as soon as taste changed their emptiness became apparent. The essential dishonesty of such works remains obvious today. Yet the art historical literature suggests that these paintings can once more be taken at face value.

"Leaving historic costume behind, [Hovenden] became a quiet, sympathetic observer of the country people around his home. The *Old Version* shows the dignity and restraint, as well as the human understanding, he brought to their study. The *Man Smoking* is one of a genial series of studies of Negro life, in many of which this same man appears."[13]

"Here is a young woman [Caroline de Bassano] in the pride of her beauty and elegance, eyes alight, lips slightly parted, the clear skin of her throat and shoulders glowing above her low corsage as she throws back her enveloping evening cloak. She is the luminous vision of a moment against the darkness, about to sweep past on her way to the Opera. It is a mysterious power of art to make an instant timeless and to evoke by its presence a whole world."[14]

The mystification of art depends upon two things: upon our surrendering our capacity to judge and upon an unquestioning acceptance of authority in place of that capacity—the authority of the printed word and the authority of scholarly titles and distinctions. To believe in explanations like the ones printed above is to deny the evidence of our eyes and our experience of the world. Once such explanations are called into question their fundamental irrelevance—to art and to experience—becomes inescapable.

The mystification of art takes our passivity for granted. It encourages us to look upon art as if art had no bearing on experience. We have attempted to show that passivity is not an inevitable state of affairs: demystification begins with the claiming of powers we already possess.

13. Richardson, p. 176.
14. Richardson, p. 210.

John Brown

People hold two prevailing views of John Brown and the Harpers Ferry expedition.

Some call him a crazy man and his plan wild and quixotic, but even they admit that it was a lightning bolt that illuminated the struggle ahead.

"John Brown's stormy life illustrates the passions aroused by the question of slavery which brought the country to civil war. No one will ever be able to understand exactly what led him with only eighteen men to seize the United States arsenal at Harpers Ferry on the night of October 16, 1859 and to remain there inflexibly in the face of certain death."

—E.P. Richardson commenting on "The Last Moments of John Brown" by Thomas Hovenden in *American Art, An Exhibition from the Collection of Mr. & Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, page 180.*

"Harpers Ferry Raid, the (Oct. 16-18, 1859) was the most positive blow struck by the anti-slavery forces in the half-century of agitation for the abolition of slavery in the United States. . .; it created such public discussion and political turmoil that for the first time, national thought was thoroughly aroused on the issue. In its influence on the stream of history . . . the quixotical foray of captain John Brown and his small army of men looms up as a milestone."
—*Dictionary of American History*—Scribners

Others, including scholars like W.E.B. DuBois, who have carefully researched the plan and its execution conclude that it was militarily feasible and very nearly succeeded.

"He was simple, exasperatingly simple; unlettered, plain and homely. No casuistry of culture or of learning, of well-being or tradition moved him in the slightest degree; 'slavery is wrong,' he said—'kill it.' . . . It is wrong by whatever name it is called, or in whatever guise it lurks, and whenever it appears. But it is especially heinous, black and cruel when it masquerades in the robes of law and justice and patriotism. So was American slavery clothed in 1859, and it had to die by revolution, not by milder means."
—*John Brown* by W.E.B. Dubois

The Last Moments of John Brown *by Thomas Hovenden from the collection of Mr. & Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, 3rd.*

John Brown's last speech—November 2, 1859

I have, may it please the Court, a few words to say.

In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted,—the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter, when I went into Missouri and there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moved them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again, on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

I have another objection; and that is, it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit, and which I admit has been fairly proved (for I admire the truthfulness and candor of the greater portion of the witnesses who have testified in this case),—had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends,—either father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children, or any of that class,—and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right; and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.

This court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me, further, to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done—as I have always freely admitted I have done—in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments,—I submit; so let it be done!

"When John Brown was executed J.D. [Rockefeller, 1st] was the only one in Cleveland who did not close his shop in respect for him . . ."

—*The Incredible Rocky* by Joel Andreas.

The Love of Art and the Art of Public Relations

"Crowds are led by symbols and phrases. Success in dealing with crowds . . . rests upon the art of getting believed in."
—Ivy Lee, public relations advisor to the Rockefeller family.

John D. Rockefeller III has spent a lot of money collecting art. He collected Oriental art and French Impressionism. Over the last ten years he has assembled one of the largest collections of American art.

Why does a man like John D. Rockefeller III collect and why does he show the public what he has collected?

JDR III, like most collectors, undoubtedly loves art.

People like JDR III also collect because they are acquisitive. Art is just one of many possible "collectables" that interest them. When JDR I finally assembled the gigantic trust, Standard Oil of New Jersey, he was collecting power. His son, JDR II, continued to build the family fortune. Among his many contributions to it is Rockefeller Center in New York City, a real estate venture of extraordinary proportions and, more than any other of his accomplishments, a monument to himself. The sons of JDR II each found areas in which to collect: Nelson collects political power, David and Laurence each control an aspect of corporate economic power and JDR III directs the philanthropic power of the family.

The very rich collect art as they collect the rest of the collectable world. It is as if they can only see the world insofar as the world can be had. People, the natural environment and human expression itself are turned into things whose value is convertible into dollars.

As a young man JDR II collected Oriental porcelains. He bought part of the J.P. Morgan porcelain collection for about a million dollars. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, the wife of JDR II and wealthy in her own right, was cofounder of the Museum of Modern Art and a trustee of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her collection formed the core of the Abby Rockefeller Museum of American Folk Art. David's Chase Manhattan Bank was an early art-collecting corporation. Nelson collects "primitive" art and contemporary art. JDR III began by collecting Asian Art and French Impressionism; now he collects American painting. Even Winthrop Rockefeller collected—rare books and antique automobiles. In the process of collecting art, the family has acquired curators and even museums. Such acquisitions are normal among families and individuals who command vast wealth. The Whitneys, the Guggenheims, the Gettys and Norton Simon all got museums of their own. Among the Rockefeller family museums are the Museum of Primitive Art and Asia House. Members of the Rockefeller family regularly sit on the boards of these and other major museums, as do members of the Dillon, Whitney, Bundy, and other powerful families.

Yet another of the reasons why the very rich collect art is philanthropic—to present it to the public. The phenomenon of the private collection made public—the Frick Mansion in New York, the Gardner Museum in Boston and the Phillips Collection in Washington—is a modern version of the traditional manor house feast. But instead of filling the stomach, it feasts the eyes. Both phenomena are experienced as occasions for generosity: in the one, the lord of the manor shares his produce with those who labor on his lands; in the other, the collector lets the public share in appreciating his treasures. The traditional response of gratitude to these philanthropic acts seems appropriate.

But there is another way to look at it that goes beyond the traditional ideas and feelings that normally mediate our experience of such events. Charity is the concept that colors and obscures how we see the feast. Charity makes invisible the real source of the wealth—the human labor that created the food and the treasure. Charity makes us believe that this wealth was magically generated by the patron alone, or, as John D.

Rockefeller I accounted for it: "God gave me my money." And charity makes us think that we ought to feel grateful when the Rockefeller's of this world give away or "share" what others have labored to produce.

Philanthropy in the form of cultural charity is also an extremely effective way of shaping the nation's perception of itself and its history. Cultural charity parallels the work of prestigious foundations, think tanks and other institutions that define the nature of scientific research, determine what our national and international social problems are, and suggest to those with power and influence the political solutions to these problems. So this exhibition tells us what our past was. In it we see a genteel, placid America, a United States made up mostly of great and wealthy men, picturesque country and frontier folk, and idyllic landscapes. Women appear as wives, debutantes or idealized visions. Blacks appear lazy and passive. Native Americans appear as romantic savages in unspoiled environments. All belong to a harmonious past interrupted only occasionally by "crazy" men such as John Brown. The exhibition obscures any view of a history made in conflict and a country built by great numbers of laboring people.

In the beginning of his career, profit not philanthropy excited the affections and absorbed the energies of John D. Rockefeller I. However, the growing conflict between American industrialists and American labor would force men like JDR to recognize the power of public opinion and to seek the means of moulding it. The danger was that working men and women were organizing, finding their own voice and insisting upon safe working conditions and a just return for their labor. Worse, they were beginning to challenge the idea that individuals have the "right" to own such enterprises as the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. The conflict in Colorado was, in fact, a conflict between Rockefeller interests and the United Mine Workers of America. It was often violent, and more than once, Rockefeller used organized, armed militias to break down the resolve of the miners. To the public, the name Rockefeller meant only boundless greed and heartlessness. In an effort to cleanse his public image—and consequently to improve his standing among influential, respectable people—he was compelled to resort to public relations.

In 1905, F.T. Gates, an early public relations advisor to the Rockefellers, wrote the following in a report urging John D. Rockefeller I to fund missionary work in the Third World.

"The fact is that heathen nations are being everywhere honeycombed with light and with civilization, with modern industrial life and applications of modern science, through the direct or indirect agencies of the missionaries. Quite apart from the question of persons converted, the mere commercial results of missionary effort to our own land is worth, I had almost said, a thousand-fold every year of what is spent on missions."
—quoted in Collier and Horowitz, The Rockefellers, *New York, 1976, p. 103.*

"We had a few very nice French Impressionist things, and then we began to collect the Asian things," Mrs. Rockefeller says. "Then, when our Asian friends began to visit us, Johnny got to thinking there wasn't a single American painting around for them to see. So he started in with the Hudson River School, reminiscent of his grandfather's day. We have several paintings that look as though they were painted from our porch."

—Mrs. J. D. Rockefeller, quoted in Geoffrey T. Hellman, "Profile on J. D. Rockefeller, III," *New York Magazine*, November 4, 1972.

The art of influencing public opinion soon became an important American industry in its own right, comprising market research and other advertising-related fields. One of the earliest accomplished practitioners of this industry, Ivy Lee, was the very man Rockefeller hired around the time of his Colorado troubles. From then on, philanthropy was used deliberately and consistently as a means of upgrading the Rockefeller image. The Rockefeller Foundation was established shortly after the Ludlow Massacre, the highpoint of violence in the effort of the Colorado miners to unionize. And down to the present, almost every major public crisis has been matched with a philanthropic act. In 1970, the family commissioned a Gallup poll to find out what the public thought of them. The survey reassured them that their image was generally positive because of their philanthropic activities.

JDR II understood better than his father the use of public relations and the good press to be gotten from philanthropy. Acts of cultural charity became a specialty of his. Under his direction, family gifts to the public were always of astonishing proportions and received immense media coverage. The Cloisters, opened to the public in 1938 and stuffed with treasures of the past, cost staggering sums to assemble and construct. In his speech at the opening ceremonies, JDR II said:

"May it well not be that the Cloisters . . . surrounded by nature at her best [JDR II supervised the landscaping of the surrounding park], will become another stimulating center for the profitable use of leisure? . . . If what has been created here helps to interpret beauty as one of the great spiritual and inspirational forces of life, having the power to transform drab duty into radiant living; if those who come under the influence of this place go out to face life with renewed courage . . . ; if the many who thirst for beauty are refreshed . . . , then those who builded here will not have built in vain."
—quoted in Myer Kutz, *Rockefeller Power*, New York, 1974, pp. 123-24.

JDR II probably believed in what he was saying about the "power" and the "influence" of art. What he omits mentioning—whether or not he thought of it—is the particular power of art he was employing at that very moment. The Rockefellers and the Fricks and the Carnegies and Exxon and IBM do not openly discuss their use of art as public relations. They utilize but do not talk about the capacity of art to transform their public images, to make them appear as responsible citizens, benefactors of their fellow men, cultural redeemers who quench the thirst of the many and care only about the public good.

Art can be utilized in creating such public images when it is treated solely as a mysterious but very precious commodity—a commodity that is somehow beneficial and uplifting to all people at all times. When art is looked at in this way—as if it says nothing in particular about the people who made it and those for whom it was made—then art is most usable and effective as public relations.

So the very rich invest in art and in art experts who are trained to handle art in this way and who can control the way the public sees and understands it. The very rich know that by thus investing in art and showing it to the public, they will appear as very, very virtuous.

John D. Rockefeller I began giving away nickels, and later dimes, as part of a self-conscious campaign to improve his negative public image.

"Fortunes put into foundations mellow with the passing of years. Andrew Carnegie is not remembered as the ruthless steel manufacturer who enforced the twelve-hour day with the lockout; he is the philanthropist whose foundations initiated a national pension system for college professors and scattered libraries around the land. Andrew Mellon is no longer thought of as the scion of the family that ravaged Pittsburgh—economically and aesthetically—but as the source of the dollars which purchased all those beautiful paintings in the National Gallery of Art in Washington. The duPonts are not the "merchants of death," whose gunpowder has boomed on the battlefields of many wars; they are the donors of the quiet rolling lawns and neatly-clipped greenery of the Winterthur estate near Wilmington, visited annually by scores of thousands of admiring tourists."
—Joseph C. Goulden, The Money Givers, *New York, 1971, pp. 49-50.*

" 'Tis an outrage indeed that Rockefeller should own the coal that God put in the earth for all the people. 'Tis an outrage that gunmen and soldiers are here protecting mines against workmen who ask a bit more than a crust, a bit more than bondage! 'Tis an ocean of outrage!"
—Mother Jones, organizer of the United Mine Workers of America

"It's my wall." "But it's my building."

Rockefeller Center is a complex of 18 buildings covering 17 acres between Fifth and Sixth Avenues and 48th and 52nd Streets in Midtown Manhattan. The land was leased from Columbia University in 1928; the major part of the project was completed in 1940.

The Rockefeller Center project was undertaken by John D. Rockefeller II and, in a real sense, it is a monument to him. He was 65 when he ceremoniously drove the last rivet. One of his sons, Nelson Rockefeller, who already had an interest in modern art, was a director of the Center during its construction.

Nelson Rockefeller hoped to "unite the famous names of Matisse, Picasso, and Rivera into a monumental mural combination".[1] Rivera was the only one of the three who agreed to the commission. In 1931 he, Frank Brangwyn and Jose Sert were commissioned. When word reached the American artists' community that three foreign artists had been chosen there was a storm of protest.

Nelson Rockefeller was also a Trustee and Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Museum of Modern Art. His mother, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, had been a cofounder of the Museum and was its treasurer. The Museum invited about 65 artists to participate in a mural exhibition: "At the present time such an exhibition would be particularly valuable for the information of many interested architects in New York who are in search of competent decorators for buildings proposed or in construction."[2]

1. Laurence Schmeckebier, *Modern Mexican Art*, University of Minnesota, 1939, p. 148.
2. Hugo Gellert, "We Capture the Walls!", *New Masses*, June 1932, p. 29.

Although the MOMA mural show was an invitational, the cartoons of three of the artists were rejected—Ben Shahn's *Sacco and Vanzetti*, William Gropper's *Class Struggle in America Since the War* and Hugo Gellert's *The Triumph of Lenin.*[3] In the face of threats of withdrawal by the other artists, and through discussions within the museum which involved Nelson Rockefeller and Ivy Lee, the three cartoons were hung.[4]

In the fall of 1932 Rockefeller Center announced the commissioning of 26 paintings and sculptures by American artists to decorate Radio City Music Hall. In January of 1933 the Art Digest reported that the Music Hall opened minus three of the commissioned pieces of sculpture—*Eve* by Gwen Lux, *Spirit of the Dance* by William Zorach and *Goose Girl* by Robert Laurent. The three are nude figures. "The three sculptors were upset. They had produced these nudes on contract. They had been beaten down in price, and none of them received what the work was worth."[5] This time Nelson was united with the artists against S. L. "Roxy" Rothafel. In the face of another artists' protest the three sculptures were restored.

In the spring of 1932 Rivera arrived in New York to execute the 63 by 17 foot mural which Nelson Rockefeller had commissioned for the lobby of the RCA Building. In keeping with the "New Frontiers" program of the decoration of the RCA Building it was to be titled *Human Intelligence in Possession of the Forces of Nature.* It was described as "man at the crossroads, looking with uncertainty but with hope and high vision to the choosing of a course leading to a new and better future."[6]

Nelson Rockefeller must have known Rivera's work and political views when he commissioned the mural. Rockefeller owned several paintings by Rivera, and Rivera had made a portrait of Nelson's sister, Abby. During 1927-28 Rivera included a caricature of John D. Rockefeller I in a well publicized fresco mural in Mexico City; in 1931 he showed 150 works at the Museum of Modern Art.

In May, as the Mural neared completion Rivera was dismissed ". . . after the manner of an ordinary proletarian."[7] He was given a check for the balance due him. At issue was the "communistic theme" of the murals; the particular incident was the inclusion of a portrait of Lenin.[8]

Three days after Rivera's work on the Rockefeller Center mural was halted he received a telegram informing him of the cancellation of a commission for the General Motors Building in the Century of Progress Exhibition to be held in Chicago. In the telegram Albert Kahn, the architect, explained that "This is undoubtedly due to the notoriety created by the Radio City situation."[9]

The response of the art community and the larger concerned community was immediate and strong—but did not prevent the mural's destruction. Rivera, in response to his dismissal, painted *The History of the Revolutionary Idea in America* at the New Workers' School on West 14th Street. Lenin and John D. Rockefeller I looked down from the same wall. The Rockefeller Center mural, in a somewhat modified form, is painted on the walls of the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* in Mexico City.

The mural program at Rockefeller Center hit at least one more snag. In October, as his painting neared completion, the Center authorities are reported to have asked Brangwyn "to leave Christ out of the picture. 'I can't conceive of the 'Sermon on the Mount' without the Saviour' . . . . 'I'm up against a stone wall and don't know what to do.' "[10]

3. The titles are from the exhibition catalogue; in the Gellert article two of the titles are different. In 1943 MOMA published *The Museum of Modern Art: The First Ten Years.* In it Conger Goodyear refers to the show and describes two of the murals: "One showed Al Capone entrenched behind money bags, operating a machine gun, with President Hoover, J. P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford as his companions, and another mixed ticker tape with pigs and financiers."
4. Ivy Lee was the MOMA attorney; he was the public relations expert who had joined the Rockefeller organization in 1913 to repair the Rockefeller image after the Ludlow Massacre.
5. The Art Digest, 1 January 1933, p. 7.
6. Ibid, 15 October 1932, p. 11.
7. Ibid, 15 May 1933, p. 41.
8. Loc cit.
9. Loc cit.
10. Ibid, 1 October 1933, p. 11.

Paughtraits

"No more paughtraits. I abhor and abjure them and hope never to do another especially of the upper classes."
—John Singer Sargent.

What do all these people have in common?
Who are they?

"When the first considerable emigration ceased about the year 1640, of the 25,000 settlers then living in the Colony, probably ninety-five per cent were small farmers or workmen engaged in the manual trades, together with many indentured servants who had come over under the terms of a contract whereby they were bonded to serve their masters for a term of years—usually five or seven. The remaining five per cent of the population was composed of those governing the colony—the stockholders in the Company, so to speak; ministers enough to supply the spiritual needs of each town and settlement, however small; a few of social position and comparative wealth; one lawyer; and a sprinkling of shopkeepers and small merchants living in the seaport towns."
—*Massachusetts Historical Society.*

What are the social functions of "paughtraits"?
Whose interests do they represent?

Who is John D. Rockefeller III?
Why is he so attracted to "paughtraits"?

"It is no accident nor is it a personal idiosyncracy on Copley's part that of the known occupations of male sitters (116) 55% were big businessmen or landed gentry (shippers, merchants, landowners or gentlemen); 28% were professionals (government officials, lawyers, doctors, teachers, ministers); 12% were craftsmen or small retail tradesmen (tailor, mason, distiller, shopkeeper, brazier, silver or goldsmith, jeweler, engraver, artist); and 5% were military men.

This cross-section constituted about 5% or less of the population—the top 5%."
—Jules David Prown, *J.S. Copley in America, 1738-1774* (1966).

What kinds of messages are "paughtraits" meant to convey?

Who creates the value of these "paughtraits"?
Who profits?

Who is made visible?
Who is made invisible?

10A
11
11A
12
12A
13
13A
14
19A
20
KODAK SAFETY FILM 5063
15A
16
16A
17
17A
18
KODAK SAFETY FILM 5063
9A
10
10A
11
11A
12
KODAK SAFETY FILM 5063

KODAK TRI-X PAN FILM
KODAK SAFETY FILM 5063

Who built the seven towers of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone? . . .
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? . . .

Young Alexander plundered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War. Who
Triumphed with him? . . .

Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?

So many particulars.
So many questions.
—Bertolt Brecht

dren, may depend on ſtrict attention being paid to them.

The hours for teaching will be from 2 o'clock until 5 Thoſe who wiſh to ſend their children to this School, will pleaſe to leave their names with Wm. Smith.

☞ Terms—one dollar entrance, and four dollars per quarter. Oct 3

LETTERS

Remaining in the Poſt Office at Cambridge, (Ms.) Oct. 1, 1805.

NATH'L. ARNOLD, Lexington; Andrew Boardman, Samuel Caſe, Dr. James P. Chaplin, Jonathan Carpenter, Joſeph Caſwell, Lawrence S. Downs, John Davis, Mrs. Betſey Lethers, Calvin Muzzy, Weſton; Benj Nickols, Mrs. Abigail Phillips, Jonas Peirce, Robert H. Quincy, John Smith, William Scollay, jun. Miſs Phebe Stimſon, Wm. Stevenſon, John Wallace, Miſs Abigail White, Little Cambridge.

EBEN'R. STEDMAN, P. M.

Wanted Immediately,

AT the Columbia Snuff Manufactory, in the City of Waſhington, a few Tobacco ſpinners and Segar makers—Alſo to hire by the year or otherwiſe, a few white boys, and 10 or 15 black boys and girls, from 10 to 20 years of age. Liberal wages will be given. For particulars enquire of Mr. E. King in G. ſtreet, oppoſite the ſeven buildings in the city of Waſhington, or at the Manufactory at Cazanaves Mill.

P. S. Wanted a man to attend a Griſt Mill.

July 1ſt 1803 Sawet.

Fifty Dollars Reward!

LAST Night, about 11 o'clock, the Store of GOODWIN & CALTON, head of *Fort-hill Wharf*, was broken open, and the ſum of Five Dollars and upwards, in Change, was taken with the drawer, and ſundry articles of Groceries, to a conſiderable amount, ſtolen therefrom—They therefore, offer the above Reward, to any perſon or perſons, who will apprehend the Thief or Thieves, ſo that *He* or *They*, may be brought to condign puniſhment. *Boſton, Oct. 9.*

On MONDAY next, at 12 o'clock,

At Bray's-Wharf,

THE faſt-ſailing ſch'r. TRYALL, 95 tons, 9 months old, high deck, well found and full rigged, light ſails, &c. can be ſent to ſea at a ſmall expence.—Inventory and terms made known at time of ſale. J. W. QUINCY, Auct.

FOR SALE,

Sixty Negroes,

THAT have been well treated and brought up, of all ages, and both ſexes, Houſe Servants, and Mechanics, but moſtly plantation Negroes.

Information may be had by applying at the office of the Waſhington Federaliſt.

Negroes for Sale.

Three or four very likely Negro Boys,

ALL about twelve years old, and accuſtomed to Waiting.—A liberal credit will be given; Enquire of the printers.

Nov. 26. Sawlm

Samuel May,

HAS received per the Packet, Sally, Amphion and Dryade, from Liverpool—and the Neptune, from London,

A Part of his Fall Supply—comprising a very extenſive aſſortment of IRONMONGERY—SADDLERY—CUTLERY and HARD WARE GOODS—which are opening for Sale at a ſmall advance, for Caſh or approved Credit, *At STORE No. 26, Union-Street.*

oct. 3.

Torrey & Symmes,

No. 5, DOCK-SQUARE,

HAVE received by the late arrivals, an extenſive aſſortment of

HARD-WARE.

Which they will ſell at a ſmall advance, by wholeſale and retail; and aſſure their Friends and Cuſtomers, that they can be ſupplied as cheap as at any ſtore in Boſton.

ſept 16 (ep6w)

Freeman, Baty and Cuſhing,

No. 8, Dock-Square,

HAVE imported in the late ſhips from Liverpool, & *Neptune* from *London*, A large ſupply of European GOODS and HARD-WARE, comprising an extenſive aſſortment. AS ABOVE,

Bales and Packages of Goods, entitled to debenture on exportation. Sept 26.

NOTICE.

THE Co-partnerſhip which hath ſubſiſted between the Subſcribers under the firm of *Aaron Davis, & Co.* was by mutual conſent diſſolved on the 20th inſt.—All perſons that have unſettled buſineſs with the ſaid Company are requeſted immediaty to call on Aaron and Charles Davis, or Stephen Sampſon for adjuſtment, who are authorized to cloſe all the buſineſes relating to ſaid firm.

RALPH SMITH,
AARON DAVIS,
CHARLES DAVIS,
STEPHEN SAMPSON.

The buſineſs in future will be carried on by AARON and CHARLES DAVIS, and STEPHEN SAMPSON, under the firm of AARON DAVIS, & CO.

Ruxbury, Sept. 25, 1805.

RUN away on the third inſtant, a copper-coloured WOMAN, named Lois, large ſize, ſhe has a father and mother living in Newfield, where it is ſuppoſed ſhe has gone to. All perſons are forbid harbouring or employing her on penalty of the law. Whoever will return ſaid Lois to the ſubſcriber, ſhall receive one dollar reward and all reaſonable charges.

EBENEZER GRACIE.

William Ellery Channing

Mrs. Charles Apthorp

Luman Reed

Social status and class position are embodied in "paughtraits." To own a "paughtrait" is to own what it embodies. "Paughtraits" reinforce the status quo.

"The struggle of the have nots against the haves in the United States is a class war."
—Frances Wright, 1826.

AMERICA
BANKING HOUSE OF STEPHEN GIRARD
1811
Smithsonian
Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd
with Copley's Nassau, father and son
BRIDGEPORT BANK
1806
Bronson
MERCHANTS BANK, N.Y.
1803
Swartout
Bayard,
Gracie,
Burrall
James Roosevelt
Varick,
Hamilton,
HARTFORD BANK
1792
Wadsworth
HE UNITED STATES
1791
Wadsworth
Wadsworth
Hamilton
Wadsworth
BANK OF NEW YORK
1784
Wadsworth
Seton, Church

"Were I to characterize the U.S., it would be by the appellation of 'the land of speculation.' The very Fathers of the Republic, Washington, Franklin, Livingston, and most of the others were busy buying land at $.25 the acre and selling it off at $2.00 the acre in parcels of 10,000 acres or more. The very occasion of choosing the site for the national capitol had been the outcome of collusion between the land grabbers, speculators and the statesmen."
—An English traveler in 1796.

Charles Carroll of Carrollton in the late 18th century earned in excess of £1,800 annually.

Robert Livingston earned in excess of £850 excluding income from his farm and houses in New York.

"The poor are asking why they should suffer while the rich multiply. Hundreds of families, respectable people . . . are sinking among the indigent. . . . On that day I read Mr. J. P. Morgan launched his new $2,500,000 yacht."
—Louis Adamic, *Dynamite*

Average expenses of a bachelor in 1790 would be about £18 per year, a family of four would require £45 per year. Skilled workers earned on average £30 per year, ordinary workers earned on average £15 per year.
—Jackson T. Main, *Social Structure of Revolutionary America.*

Young and healthy Negroes produced profits of up to £100 per hand per year.

"War is robbery, commerce generally cheating."
—Ben Franklin, Works (Vol. 2, p. 376).

1930: The nuptials of Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller and Mary Todd Hunter Clark "in beautiful simplicity" cost $100,000.00.
—*New York Herald.*

Are commissioned paughtraits "high art" and their subjects fine people?

Charles Carroll

Charles Carroll of Carrollton had expenses of £400 in 1790 exclusive of Food produced by his farm.
—Main, *Soc. Struc. of Rev. Am.*

In 1840, in the Lowell, Massachusetts's factories (owned by the Lowells, Dwights, Cabots, Jacksons—all good Christians), women earned $2.50 per week, paying $1.25 per week for board in company houses. An observer, Orestes Brownson, noted "the great mass wear out their health. . . . When they can no longer toil, the poor girls go home to die." They worked 13½ hours per day, 6 days per week.

It is an interesting fact that the first entrepreneur in the field of American iron industry was an aristocrat—John Winthrop, Jr.
—Fritz Redlich, *History of American Business Leaders.*

"As ordinary an episode on the river as is today the sight of a filling station attendant . . . outrageous characters."
—E.P. Richardson

"Those workers rioting for higher wages are the dregs and scum of the world."
—*Journal of Commerce*, New York, 1836.

On indentured servants: "They are the property of their masters, irresponsible, unhealthy, immoral."
—*Soc. Struc. of Rev. Am.*

"Only the shiftless, diseased or vicious were laborers."
—Timothy Dwight of the Lowell, Mass. Dwights, quoted in *Soc. Struc. of Rev. Am.*

Are illustrations of workers and others "low art" and their subjects coarse?

"From an economic standpoint, such involvement in the arts can mean direct and tangible benefits. It can provide a company with extensive publicity and advertising, a brighter public reputation, and an improved corporate image."
—David Rockefeller, September 20, 1966.

"Ever heard that business is business, well so is politics business and reporting, journalism, doctoring, all professions, arts, sports, . . . everything is business."
R. Crocker to Lincoln Steffens, *Lincoln Steffens' Autobiography.*

To Have and Have Not

We are often assured that museums are central to our existence as civilized, spiritually complete beings. We are also told that museums bring art closer to people and help make art a part of life.

A visit to almost any modern art museum teaches the exact opposite of these claims. Inside and out, modern museums are designed to keep art away from people—physically, psychologically and intellectually—and to keep art removed from daily life. It is telling that so many modern museums resemble windowless tombs, bunkers or bank vaults. Both of the museums pictured on this page are reminiscent of the fortified castle keeps of the dark ages (the Whitney actually has a moat). By design, modern museums literally force people to experience art as untouchable, unexplainable treasures—refrigerated relics from the past or the present. Museums architecturally enforce the untruth that art comes only in scarce, ownable forms that must be protected from both the elements and human understanding.

The Whitney Museum

The Denver Art Museum

Black Art and Historical Omission

The omission of Black artists from the Rockefeller collection is consistent with the history of Black American experience in general. Like the experience of women and the poor, the history of Black people has been scrupulously forgotten—unwritten into American history and art history. If we choose to remember Black artists now, it is not to admire individual talents but to understand Black experience.

The struggle against racism and an especially severe class oppression is central to the Black experience. Art, through its function of establishing a self or group identity, has been one of the means of resisting that oppression. The history of Black art in America involves the effort to rebuild a visual arts tradition that was shattered by slavery and racism. The problem has been all the more difficult since, in many ways, the fine arts represented the culture of the oppressor.

Black American art began when the first Africans were brought as slaves to Virginia. They carried with them richly developed African rituals and traditions of carving, music, dance, weaving, ironworking, and jewelry-making. Some of these forms were kept alive and developed; modern American music both popular and "serious" is deeply indebted to the Afro-American cultural heritage. Certain visual arts also survived, especially pottery, basket weaving and carving. Elaborately carved walking sticks and face jugs, for example, are evidence that the system of slavery did not completely destroy African traditions in the visual arts.

But under the impact of slavery, African languages were virtually wiped out, rituals and ceremonies were prohibited, and much slave art (that which the slave owners could not turn to profit) was destroyed. The intent of slavery was to turn Africans and their descendents into docile cogs in a social and economic machine. To accomplish this, slave owners acted systematically to strip Afro-Americans of their cultural heritage.

At the same time, slave owners found it profitable to train slaves in European crafts. The Southern economy soon became dependent on Black artisans—ironsmiths, silversmiths, furniture makers, couturiers. In Louisiana, by the 1830s, about 85% of skilled labor was Black. One of the best known cabinet makers in South Carolina was a Black man, Thomas Day. In the slave South in general, the sale of cabinet makers, dressmakers, cooks and smiths brought great profits to slave traders. It is rarely remembered that the fine old churches and stately mansions so admired by art historians were built by slaves.

But while Blacks were allowed to become artisans,[1] they were, with few exceptions, barred from learning painting, sculpture, and the other fine arts. Even long after slavery was abolished, the racist notion that Blacks could not master

[1] It should be noted however that by the second half of the nineteenth century, the South passed legislation prohibiting Blacks from pursuing artisanal trades.

Slave and picture auction in the New Orleans Rotunda

skills unassociated with labor justified their exclusion from the cultural institutions which provided the necessary technical training.

Something of the racism an aspiring Black artist had to endure to receive training at a white art institution is illustrated in Henry O. Tanner's student experience. In 1880, the young Tanner was admitted to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts on the basis of some works he had sent to the academy by mail. No one knew he was Black until he arrived. Joseph Pennell, a white classmate, gave a racist account of Tanner's experience:

"He came, he was young, an octoroon, very well dressed, far better than most of us. His wool, if he had any, was cropped so short you could not see it, and he had a nice moustache . . . We were interested at first, but he soon passed almost unnoticed, though the room was hot. Little by little, however, we were conscious of a change. I can hardly explain, but he seemed to want things; we seemed in the way, and the feeling grew. One night we were walking down Broad Street, he with us, when from a crowd of people of his color, who were walking up the street, came a greeting, "Hullow, George Washington, house yer getin on wid yer white frens?" Then he began to assert himself and, to cut a long story short, one night his easel was carried out into the middle of Broad Street, and, though not painfully crucified, he was firmly tied to it and left there."[2]

[2] Elwood Parry. *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art*, 1590—1900, p. 165.

Joshua Johnston, Mrs. Abraham White and Daughter Rose

Am I not a Man and a Brother? —*by an English engraver*

In spite of the barriers, Blacks did become artists but were promptly forgotten by official historians for having done so. Or if historians recorded their work, it was forgotten that the artists were Black. Everyone knows Audubon's *Birds of America*. But who remembers that Audubon was Black?

If we now remember who Audubon was and recall from obscurity other Black artists, it is not merely to add their names to the history of the fine arts. The point is not simply that Blacks are "capable" of fine art, but rather that the category of "fine art" and those admitted into its pantheon were socially and institutionally controlled. The point is not that some Blacks qualified as fine artists but that most Blacks, along with the vast majority of other powerless Americans, were disqualified. And the fact that Black artists remained invisible reinforced the myth that Blacks were not capable of higher, cultural pursuits.

In this regard, it is interesting to consider the history of Afro-American music. As a popular art form, the ideals and experience it reflects are not accorded the prestige and seriousness of "fine art." This art form survived and evolved more fully than most other Afro-American cultural traditions. Indeed, the extraordinary expressive power of Black music today is related to the fact that it evolved from a vital collective tradition. Music was a means of expression and communication of the Black community's experience precisely because it remained popular and thus accessible.

By contrast, the "fine arts" such as oil painting and sculpture were for the most part inaccessible: fine arts were taught only in special schools and moreover were a luxury of the upper class, therefore remote from the lives of most Black people. For example, Joshua Johnston was a highly regarded portraitist at the beginning of the 19th century. Yet his success also illuminates the dilemma of the Black artist. Of his thirty-odd known works, all but two portray whites—mainly white merchants. As a professional portraitist, Johnston couldn't create images for and about Black people; his situation prevented him from dealing with his own Black reality in his art.

Am I not a Woman and a Sister? —*probably by Patrick Reason*

But history forces upon peoples who are especially oppressed a deeper consciousness of the sources of oppression. If circumstances prevented Johnston from portraying the experience of Black Americans, other Black artists were determined to confront in their art American racism and poverty. The earliest of these artists were attached to the abolitionist movement. The engraver and lithographer Patrick Reason, and later the sculptor Edmonia Lewis both produced works which dealt with the issue of slavery. Out of the Harlem Renaissance (or the New Negro Movement) of the twenties and thirties emerged a school of Afro-American artists who consciously rejected the notion of art for art's sake and encouraged Black artists to portray the experience of Black Americans. The works of Jacob Lawrence, Charles White, Horace Pippin, to name but a few, came out of this period.

Today Black art like Black experience in general is still considered to exist outside of American traditions. What is Black art? asks Elsa Honig Fine: "The question, 'What is Black art?' is political rather than aesthetic. 'Black art' is a convenient term used to identify the product of artists who happen to be Black at a time when political and social pressures forced established American institutions to recognize the achievements of the Black." The category "Black art" is now used by cultural institutions to treat work by Black artists as something distinct and removed from "traditional American fine art." While the Whitney, for example, will hold a Jacob Lawrence retrospective in an isolated context, it will omit Black artists from more general American exhibitions such as the Rockefeller exhibition.

Omission is one of the mechanisms by which fine art reinforces the values and beliefs of the powerful and suppresses the experiences of others. Fine art is defined as a category that speaks for all of us, and we are assured that the gifted always find their way into it. A liberal art historian in a book about nineteenth century images of American Indians and Blacks concludes nevertheless that "the highest ideals and aspirations of American society are clearly revealed in the finest pictures and statues."[3] This kind of argument ignores the exclusion of Indian and Black experience from the fine arts. The subtle implication is that the aspirations and ideals held by those who do not have access to the fine arts are not as "American" or as "high."

The production of fine art in the nineteenth century, as in the present, was not a free human enterprise that anyone could undertake. Social conditions limited who became an artist and what artists created, not to mention who decided which pictures were the finest. The actual training artists received and the artistic "ideals," traditions and standards of taste they learned were important factors in determining the specific content of their art. The language of "fine art" was largely evolved to express visions of Beauty, Nature and American life that wealthy American art patrons wanted to see. And it is that America that John D. Rockefeller III gives us today as our past—an America in which we can see working class Blacks and whites and Indians only as happy, colorful and content.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

"Loading plan for slave ship."

Horace Pippin, John Brown Going to his Hanging

Charles White, The Harvest

Jacob Lawrence, " . . . and the migrants kept coming."

Black section, Pittsburgh, 1941

Romare Bearden

Jacob Lawrence, Race Riots Were Very Numerous All Over the North

" . . . Real revolution won't occur until poor whites as well as poor Blacks realize they are oppressed."
—Malcolm Bailey

Malcolm Bailey, Hold: Separate but Equal

The Politics of No Ideas

Contrary to the popular myth, paintings do not stand outside of our creation of history. Even the works of those who proclaim and truly believe in art's political neutrality are engaged in this process.

Official art history claims the political neutrality of art and obscures its involvement in history:

"No one will ever understand . . . "

"It is impossible for us to comprehend today . . . "

"It is difficult for us to imagine . . . "

These are the phrases that E. P. Richardson, the cataloger of the Rockefeller collection uses to distance us from our past. By the use of these obscuring phrases we are made to feel that the past is incomprehensible to us; that our ideas do not apply. He consistently glosses over the very real effects of historical events and ideas on people and on art. The faculty which he asks us to bring to understanding painting is our appreciation of the poetic. The faculty which painters are considered to bring to the creation of art is their "imagination."

It is this conception of art which has selected to show only twelve paintings from the twentieth century in an historical exhibition of American art. Perhaps this is because the problems of twentieth century art cannot be so readily separated from our experience of life. Current questions—art as personal struggle or as vehicle of propaganda, as valuable object or as reflection of America, or as whatever art has been thought to be in our time—cannot now be tied up in poeticized conclusions and confined to the "realm of the imagination."

But there have been twentieth century painters who think ideas are extraneous to art. Richardson poeticizes to avoid issues: painters claim to be preoccupied with "reality"—"I just paint what I see"—to dismiss the political content or context of their work. Some have gone much further than this. In the nineteen-thirities Thomas Hart Benton loudly rejected the whole idea of ideas in art and even in politics. He claimed that American artists do not derive art from ideas and that even politics must "rely wholly on pragmatic observation of developing facts."[1] But one can only be pragmatic in relation to goals, and art has goals as well even if they are not consciously expressed.

Nonetheless, Benton was not unique in proposing an America that has no use for ideas. This claim derived from an irrational notion that accompanied the first European settlers to this continent. American "virginal wilderness," a state of nature long absent from the European continent, was felt to be a powerful force which would somehow put Americans in touch with "authentic" instincts. According to this myth, contact with the frontier and uncorrupted nature endowed Americans with directness and "authenticity." Even today almost every American has been touched by this frontier myth. The migration back to the soil by disillusioned activists of the sixties is just one of the contemporary manifestations. Now, however much we enjoy vacations and appreciate clean air, there is no rational basis for the belief that contact with soil will make one "authentic" or able to live without ideas.

Richardson uses this mysterious endowment of the frontiersman to explain the unique origins of American art: "Painting on this continent is not like the European schools . . . Painting sprang up here, in the wilderness, wherever men of Western origin settled, where there was nothing to foster it—nothing but the inner urge. a need of the imagination, a thirst of the soul, that demanded satisfaction and created the art, by sheer force of the will, while the forest trees still grew around them."[2] Thus Richardson carries this popular American belief to its mythic proportions, obscuring the possibility of a realistic understanding of history.

[1] "Benton Goes Home," *Art Digest*, 15 April 1935, p. 13.
[2] E. P. Richardson, *A Short History of Painting in America*, 1956, p. 4.

The frontier of the unexplored west disappeared in the nineteenth century. But the idea of American uniqueness bound up with direct contact with nature remained. Benton, among other American Scene Painters, found this contact in painting a rural America of family farms. But this too was already a nostalgic myth. Mechanization of farming and consolidation of landholdings had begun in the nineteenth century; the need for food during the first World War accelerated the mechanization. The farm depression which began in 1920 and continued until the second World War brought foreclosures and further consolidations, causing independent diversified farmers to leave the land and move to the cities. The era of the independent family farm was over: agri-business was already becoming the new form.

At the same time European immigrants were working in the sweatshops and factories of the eastern cities. In the context of the frontier myth of authentic American life these immigrants brought with them dangerous impurities—European traditions and theories. Benton vilified the eastern cities as pockets of corruption. "New York, stacked up against the rest of America, is a highly provincial place . . . It, more than any city in our country, harbors the attenuated political, artistic, and economic ideas of Europe."[3] Benton's rejection of ideas led him to reject foreigners.

American art, he argued, must be understandable to an American audience that only responds to "facts," a public that is not swayed by ideas. "Authentic" American art must present "particular" reality; not abstractions, generalizations or ideologies. He opposed abstract art because it originated in Europe and because it was based on theories and generalizations. Social Realism was rejected on the same grounds. Its socialist base was rejected as foreign and ideological. Neither abstraction nor social realism, he felt, rested on the direct American experience of the "particular." Ironically, although he rejected modern forms he claimed Renaissance art as the model for his paintings. The Renaissance was so remotely in the past and so universally accpeted that he did not question its Italian origins, nor its ideological implications.

[3] Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 1937, p. 262.

In Benton's America, ideas had no more place in politics than they had in art. " . . . ideas held by professors are just ideas, but when they get into the heads of politicians, they have the potentialities of sticks of dynamite."[4] Worse still, when they get into the heads of "the real proletarians:" "Should a militant and solid proletarian black class under clever agitation manage to get strength in the colored pockets of the southern cities, it would precipitate a prompt race war . . . "[5] Benton saw this race war as the first of a series of disastrous consequences. Ideas were feared because they would destroy the American innocence and directness, and because they might be effective. The violence of rural American life was considered to be fact—authentic and therefore not to be opposed.

Benton travelled America. He made paintings which he claimed were free from ideas—just based on direct observation. Stuart Davis, a painter diametrically opposed to Benton had this to say about his observation: "Are the gross caricatures of Negroes by Benton to be passed off as direct representations? . . . Had they a little more wit, they would automatically take their place in the body of propaganda which is constantly being utilized to disenfranchise the Negro politically, socially, and economically."[6] Apparently, they had enough "wit" to be appreciated in a racist review in the Art Digest: "He has caught the American Negro in all his typical humor, swagger and lankiness. With oversized feet and huge hands these dark subjects have allowed laziness to sink right into their bones, until life's most difficult problem is for them to raise their heads."[7] The reviewer's appreciation of this racist caricature points to the political effectiveness of Benton's paintings (even though they were not "based on ideas"). The popular press accepted the myth of a rural America of independent farmers and rugged, often violent individualists and propelled it into a receptive popular consciousness. Benton was singled out as the creator of "the outstanding style in American painting"[8] by Thomas Craven

[4] Ibid., pp. 259-260

[5] Ibid, p. 189

[6] Stuart Davis, *Art Front*, February 1935, p. 6.

[7] *Art Digest*, 15 April 1935, p. 15.

[8] Thomas Craven, *Modern Art*, 1934, p. 339.

in his best selling book, *Modern Art.* Benton painted a cover self portrait for the issue of *Time Magazine* which promoted American Scene Painting as if it were all of American Painting. *Life Magazine* gave American Scene Painting its journalistic stamp of approval through dozens of articles with lavish color reproductions. Benton's own autobiography, published in 1937, had a wide popular audience.

Davis' attack on the innocence of Benton's art and American Scene Painting in *Art Front* and *Art Digest* did not reach the larger audience of *Life Magazine* and the Book of the Month Club. It did, however, point out the political nature of that kind of art. Davis called American Scene Painting jingoistic and called Benton a racist, an anti-semite and a nihilist.[9] Davis detected Benton's ideology and recognized its danger—obviously, the politics of no ideas does not mean no politics.

Richardson, in his *Short History of American Painting* remarked that Craven and Benton "made many violently extravagant statements, yet can one blame them?"[10] Richardson feels that one cannot. To blame Benton would require judgments based on political ideas—something both Benton and the "official" historians of American art like Richardson claim to avoid. Art, Richardson tells us, is not the realm of political ideas; art is the realm of the imagination.

[9] Stuart Davis, *Art Front*, February 1935, p. 6 and *Art Digest*, 1 April 1935, pp. 12-13 and 26-27.
[10] Richardson, Op cit, p. 294.

Looking for Women in the Rockefeller Collection

The Centennial of 1876

At the Centennial of 1876, for the first time an entire separate building was allocated for the display of women's work. Through an enormous grass roots effort among women, examples of women's attainments in all of the arts and sciences were amassed in one building. Over six hundred exhibits displayed women's expanding contributions to such fields as journalism, medicine, science, art, literature, inventions, teaching, business and social work. The Women's Pavillion both reflected and celebrated middle-class women's growing consciousness of their professional potential.

But there were women's voices not heard in the Pavillion. Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke for them when she and other feminists refused to support the Pavillion:

"The Pavillion was no true exhibit of women's art . . . It did not include samples of objects made by women in factories owned by men such as textiles, shoes or Waltham watches. . . Upon its walls should have hung . . . framed copies of all the laws bearing unjustly upon women—those which rob her of her name, her earnings, her property, her children, her person. . . . Women's most fitting contributions would have been these protests, laws and decisions, which show her political slavery."
—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1876

The women for whom Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke also left a record, although it is not what has been recorded as history.

"It was windy during the night and I didn't sleep well. Did a lot of washing and cleaning even though I was tired. Made some pop-overs with disastrous results. Had to rush after dinner to get all ready to ride with Papa, and then get myself together for the ballgame. The game was well disappointing. Monson 9. Emannuell 11. But we had a lot of fun. Later came home with Nan and talked to Johns and Leaky. Met Easter and rushed to get supper. Mixed the bread, sprinkled the clothes and wrote two letters. Read to Grandmother. Saw the tail of a comet at sunset. It was just a long white streak in the red sky."

Ther. Wed. May 18, 1910 Wea.
Raining
Ther. Thurs. May 19, 1910 Wea.
Fair

A page from the diary of Helen Louise Fagan written in 1908 at the age of 16. Daughter of a second generation Irish immigrant family, she lived in Munson, Massachusetts.

Women are not a marginal "minority," and their history is not a collection of missing facts and views to be incorporated into traditional categories. Human history consists of more than the activities pursued by men.

Detail of quilt made by Eunice W. Cook, Vermont, 1800's.

The Bicentennial of 1976

Looking for Women in the Rockefeller Collection of American Art.

"When I was a little girl I was fascinated by the kind of dressing-table mirror which was in three parts. . . . I used to wonder which bit was really me . . . The mirror held a certain magic. The picture started to assume its own reality. . . . I felt invisible inside myself although my appearance was clearly visible in the glass.

"The prevailing social order stands as a great and resplendent hall of mirrors. It owns and occupies the world as it is and the world as it is seen and heard. . . . In order to create an alternative an oppressed group must at once shatter the self-reflecting world which encircles it and, at the same time, project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity, as distinct from that of the oppressor, it has to become visible to itself."

—Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World,* 1973

Rockefeller continues the tradition of the invisibility of women.

There are 104 paintings in this collection. One is by a woman. By any standards, nineteenth-century women artists are grossly underrepresented. Among the many outstanding women artists of the last century (to mention only a few) are: Cecelia Beaux, Mary Cassatt, Eliza Greatorex, Harriet Hosmer, Annie Tranquair Lang, Mary Jane Peale, Emily Sartain and Lilly Martin Spencer. The subtle tyranny of this show lies not simply in the fact that it excludes women artists. The number of paintings by women in this collection is not the only or even the real issue. The issue is how women are seen and taught to see themselves in the culture in general and in such prestigious collections as this in particular.

In this exhibition, not only is the imagery which depicts the lives of women consistently viewed from a male perspective, but the commentary reinforces and underlines the existence of women as objects of male vision and not human beings in their own right.

The Ladies in the Rockefeller Collection

Mrs. Charles Apthorp by Robert Feke.

"Grizzel Eastwick (1709-1796), the subject of this portrait, married Charles Apthorp on January 13, 1726. Her husband was paymaster and commissioner of the British naval forces which had their headquarters at Boston, where he became a wealthy and prominent merchant. . . . Mrs. Apthorp sits, serene, elegant, untroubled, holding a copy of *Paradise Lost* open on her knee. We know from other sources that she was the mother of eighteen children."
—E.P. Richardson, from the catalogue of the Rockefeller collection.

Caroline de Bassano, Marquise d'Espeuilles by John Singer Sargent.

"Here is a young woman in the pride of her beauty and elegance, eyes alight, lips slightly parted, the clear skin of her throat and shoulders glowing above her low corsage as she throws back her enveloping evening cloak. She is the luminous vision of a moment against the darkness. . ."
—E.P. Richardson

Anna Porter Brown by Joseph Badger.

"The portrait of Anna Porter of Wenham, Massachusetts, who married Nathaniel Brown of Salem in 1743, tells us a good deal about this serious, responsible New England housewife. There is no hint of a smile in the earnest mouth; the eyes are straightforward, her face plain; yet there is something attractive in this directness of character. One feels certain that her family was well cared for and her home quiet and orderly."
—E.P. Richardson

Such characterizations of women are not only urged on us as ideals and norms, they are enforced by customs, institutional life and law. And they are internalized and perpetuated by women themselves.

Portrait of a little girl by Elizabeth Gowdy Baker.

"Although the presence of what is usually termed nude statuary, in domestic Society is not inconsistent with the purest and most refined intercourse . . . in a Public Exhibition, the circumstances are dissimilar . . . be it therefore resolved, that a close fitting, but inconspicuous fig leaf be attached to the Apollo Belvedere, Laocoon, Fighting Gladiator, and other figures as are similarly in need of it."
—Resolution of Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, 1856.

"When Mrs. Willard in 1821 submitted to the New York Legislature the first plan for the higher education of girls ever proposed in the United States, she was careful to state that she wished to produce no 'College-bred' females, and that there were to be no 'exhibitions' in her school, since 'public speaking forms no part of female education.' "
—Arthur W. Calhoun, *Social History of the American Family*

In a public speech of 1854, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had this to say of women's legal status:

"The wife who inherits no property holds about the same legal position that does the slave on the Southern plantation. She can own nothing, sell nothing. She has no right even to the wages she earns; her person, her time, her services are the property of another. She can not testify, in many cases, against her husband. She can get no redress for wrongs in her own name in any court of justice. She can neither sue nor be sued. She is not held morally responsible for any crime committed in the presence of her husband, so completely is her very existence supposed by the law to be merged in that of another. . ."

Yet women were entering cultural institutions. The Pennsylvania Academy was one of the first institutions of art to make its facilities available to women. In 1844 women were given a special time for use of the statue gallery where they could draw from the plaster casts in privacy, separated from the men. Drawing from the live model was preserved for the men only. In the 1850's and 1860's women students began to organize behind the issue of their right to draw from the nude, finally winning this privilege in 1868. The issue was crucial because in the nineteenth century, drawing from the nude was considered to be the foundation of serious art.

"Does it pay for a young lady of a refined, godly household to be urged as the only way of obtaining knowledge of true art to enter a class where every feeling of maidenly delicacy is violated, where she becomes . . . familiar with the persons of degraded women and the sight of nude males, [so] that no possible art can restore her lost treasure of chaste and delicate thoughts. . . ? The stifling heat of the room adds to the excitement, and what might be a cool unimpassioned study in a room at 35°, at 85° or even higher is dreadful."
—A letter to the Pennsylvania Academy protesting the life class for women.

Beyond the concern for proprieties, something else seems to lurk beneath this talk of fig leaves and temperatures. While appearing to protect ladies, men seem to have wanted to protect themselves—from women. For nineteenth-century men, along with many of their brothers in the twentieth century, often found the idea of female sexuality frightening. Rather than face their own fears, they projected them onto women, and sought to control where ladies might gaze. Thus they created a social climate in which women—or at least ladies—were bound to regard their own sexuality as fearsome.

Women's Life Drawing Class on the fourth floor of the Art Students League between 1893 and 1898.

Fear of women could even color eulogies to motherhood. In the following statement, written by the critic Edwin Bye in 1918, the fact that women bear children becomes a reason why they must be excluded from the lofty task of art. Bye argued that great art reveals a "titanic strength" and strikes the viewer with an impression of "pure masculinity".

"Why this emphasis upon masculine strength and virility. . . ? Because the production of a work of art demands these things. . . . Painting is the hardest kind of work. Even an ordinary sketch demands of an artist whole souled concentration. . . . Can a [woman] ever be the creator in the sense that we have explained? There is one thing preeminently that a woman can create, and that is her child. To create that child is the greatest aspiration of her life, and when she does that she rightly cares for nothing else. [A man] can have his children and yet pursue his great objective in life—success in his career. That is why women have never been great painters. . . . The lives of great men painters show us they devoted themselves so exclusively to their art they often neglected all other interests, their families included. This would be a sacrifice with a woman, tragic for the race."
—from the magazine, *The Art World and Arts and Decoration*, 1918.

Bye's weak reasoning, already given the lie by a host of brilliant nineteenth-century women writers, barely conceals a deeper fear that women might touch and shape the revered symbols of high culture.

Why There Are No "Great" Women Artists.

Two more views:

Number 1

An American girl from California was a student at the Academie Julian, an important Paris art school of the 1800's. She was said to have had little familiarity with culture and no background in art. Her only attribute was an incredible faculty for drawing. Her work was acclaimed by all the instructors. When she failed to continue her studies and disappeared, Cecelia Beaux spoke of her:

"She was one of the gifted who have no sense of their own value, so far do their dreams carry them beyond what they do, and the discouragement, with such, may submerge effort. So the rarest appears and floats away while the ordinary we always have with us."
—From *Seven Women: Great Painters* by Winthrop and Frances Nelson, 1969

"It is quite true that there are no limits to masculine egotism in ordinary life. In order to change the conditions of life we must see them through the eyes of women."
—Leon Trotsky.

Number 2

Charles D. Gibson.

Mother and Child with Mirror by Mary Cassatt.

The Banjo Lesson by Henry O. Tanner.

What we identify as genius does not spring full blown from the cradle as an innate characteristic of the lucky few, but is built up minutely step by step and nourished carefully over a period of years. In our society, race, class and sex largely determine what kind of nourishment a child will get and what that child can be.

Art itself is an aspect of the social process that teaches us how to see ourselves and others.

William Vassal and His Son Leonard by John Singleton Copley.

Mother Jones leading children in a demonstration against child labor.

"No matter what your fight, don't be ladylike!
God Almighty made women and the Rockefeller gang of thieves made the ladies."
—Mother Jones, American trade union organizer.

Moment Musicale by Charles Frederick Ulrich.

The ideal of the at-home lady celebrated in so much art was relentlessly promoted by American churchmen, doctors and educators. It was, however, sharply contradicted by the lived experience of vast numbers of American women who had to go outside their homes to work for wages in order to feed their families. And not all who stayed near the hearth could indulge in the genteel leisures portrayed in art. Even though the ideal of female gentility helped keep women invisible to themselves, and despite the reluctance of many to identify themselves—in private, let alone in public—with union or feminist organizations, women were visibly fighting for their rights.

Photo of unknown woman with broom, 1800's.

We have underlined the contradictions between images of leisure-class women and the realities those images denied. The conflict we are depicting, however, can be understood and explained in very different ways:

Women's struggle to attain equality of opportunity.

The struggle to end the oppression of one sex by the other.

The struggle of the working class.

Nineteenth century women already disagreed about who and what the fight was for. The women's building of 1876 argued that women as well as men can be doctors, lawyers, artists and other professionals. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, however, refused to support their pavillion because it left out lower-class women. She and Susan B. Anthony, in their "Message to Future Generations," counselled feminists not to ally with activist men because their own emanicipation would always be put off in favor of other causes. They advised a separatist stance and said of the female-male relationship:

"While regarded as his subject, his inferior, his slave, their interests must be antagonistic."

And then there was Mother Jones, the organizer of miners, who told a meeting of suffragists that she would support only that which:

"Will bring freedom to my class. . . . I am going to be honest with you sincere women who are working for votes for women. The women of Colorado have had the vote for two generations and the working men and women are in slavery. The state is in slavery, vassal to the Rockefeller-controlled Colorado Iron and Fuel Company and its subsidiary interests."

Similar positions are still argued today, and while we recognize the contradictions between them, we find some merit in all of them.

And so, we have more to say about the importance of women finding their voice in art. For the image of the lady not only oppressed the working-class woman, it also prevented the middle-class woman from realizing her full human potential.

A case in point is Susan Macdowell Eakins, the only woman artist included in the Rockefeller collection and, as such, the classic "exception", but—as it happens—a perfect representative of so many gifted, middle-class women.

Tintype of Susan Hannah Macdowell, 1878.

Susan Macdowell

"Although her husband considered her the best American woman painter, she exhibited little."
—E.P. Richardson, Rockefeller collection catalogue.

Susan was the daughter of William H. Macdowell, a distinguished engraver who worked with many of Philadelphia's leading artists. At the age of 25 she entered the Pennsylvania Academy and exhibited her work for the first time in the Academy's 47th annual exhibition. She was considered to be one of Thomas Eakins' most brilliant pupils and was respected as an activist and distinctive leader among her school peers. In 1878 she won major recognition for her talent, being awarded the Mary Smith Prize of $100 for the best painting by a resident female artist in an annual exhibition. She exhibited more works of art in that year than she ever had or would again.

Two years after she completed her studies at the Pennsylvania Academy she married her instructor Thomas Eakins. Although she sometimes painted, for the duration of her marriage she did not actively pursue her career as an artist.

Susan Eakins

". . . . she loved painting but had given it up for herself because she believed that there wasn't room for two artists in one family. . .

"Mrs. Eakins was kinda killed when she married. . . . She would have been a great painter if she hadn't married. She was a great help to him though, a sustaining influence."
—Charles Bregler, a friend of the Eakins.

"Her first concerns were always her husband's rather than her own. Susan Eakins saw to it that he could spend those precious free hours in his studio. She shielded him from household chores, extended constant hospitality to his students and large circle of friends, answered his correspondence, supervised the shipping of his pictures to exhibitions and unpacked them. . . . For years she surreptitiously gathered up . . . his sketches, studies and perspective drawings that are today's museum treasures, and which Eakins himself had tossed into the trash bin."
—Seymour Adelman

Susan Macdowell portrayed Eakins not only as an artist sitting at his easel, but as a sensitive and complex man.

Portrait of Thomas Eakins by Susan Macdowell Eakins.

Portrait of Susan Macdowell Eakins by Thomas Eakins.

When he painted her, he also looked with sympathy and saw a conscious and unique being.

The woman Eakins saw had an emotional and intellectual presence that transcends the frilly dress she nevertheless saw fit to wear.

Portrait of Kate Lewis by Susan Macdowell Eakins.

To create a new way of seeing is to create a new way of being in the world. It requires not only opening our eyes to the experiences of all those who are now invisible, but also creating a new reality in which all humankind will develop their full potential.

Three Kinds of Charity*

1. Food

F. Richard, *Madame Elisabeth de France Distributing Milk*, 1817. Versailles, Musée National. In this painting, a member of the French Royal family gives milk to orphans.

**"Charity" means sharing the consumption of something or giving away insignificant sums of money. The recipients of charity are paupers. Charity never means sharing control of the environment or sharing ownership of productive land or property. Charity keeps people from imagining this other kind of sharing.*

2. Money

John D. Rockefeller giving away dimes. Along with the dimes, he dispensed advice about the virtue of saving money.

3. Art

This picture shows a gallery of precious art objects collected by a millionaire and opened to the public.

Documents

November 3, 1975

Thomas N. Armstrong
Director
Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Mr. Armstrong,

It has come to our attention that the Whitney Museum is planning a major Bicentennial celebration exhibition to be called "Three Centuries of American Art," and that the exhibition will be entirely or largely drown from the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III collection.

We are apalled that a private collection will constitute the core of an exhibition mounted by the leading museum of American art to celebrate our revolution. An exhibition of this nature could not possibly include the various facets of American art a Bicentennial celebration should encompass: art of dissent; art by minorities; an adequate representation of art by women, reflecting a fresher and truer art historical view. We hardly need to point out to you that a serious professional attitude would demand that you range wide in curating such an exhibition, instead of accepting a ready-made show.

We would like to discuss the matter with you and the curators of the planned exhibition in a spirit of cooperation and clarification, and we will call for an appointment in the near future.

Benny Andrews
The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition

Lucy Lippard
WEB and Women's Slide Registry

Rudolf Baranik
Artists and Writers Protest

PETITION FROM THE AMERICAN ART COMMUNITY AND OTHERS
TO THE WHITNEY AND DE YOUNG MUSEUMS

Next September, as one of its four Bicentennial exhibitions, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City will present a show entitled "Three Centuries of American Art," an exhibition originating at the M. H. De Young Museum in San Francisco. This show is culled entirely from the private collection of John D. Rockefeller III. It will include no Black artists and only one woman artist. Presumably, other minorities in United States culture will also be under-represented or excluded.

Demonstrably, therefore, the exhibition is a blatant example of large cultural institutuions determining the history of art in the United States.

We, the undersigned, strongly object to the collusion of the De Young and Whitney Museums and John D. Rockefeller III in using a private collection of art, with its discriminatory omissions, to promote ruling-class values and a socially reactionary view of art.

WE DEMAND THAT THIS SHOW BE CANCELLED.

Signed:

Send signed petitions to: Art Meeting for Cultural Change
P.O. Box 551, Canal St. Sta., N.Y., N.Y. 10013

To The American Art Community from Artists Meeting for Cultural Change

Next September, as one of its four Bicentennial exhibitions, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City will present a show entitled *Three Centuries of American Art*—just what you might have expected under the circumstances—a package deal, originating in April at the De Young Museum in San Francisco.

But this show isn't simply another example of bureaucratic mediocrity as it is entirely culled from the private collection of John D. Rockefeller III and includes no Black artists and only one woman artist.

Try and imagine Rockefeller and his staff of experts quaintly constructing a history of American art from the complacent viewpoint of the power elite. What this show is not is *Three Centuries of American Art*; it is, however, a blatant example of a large cultural institution writing the history of American art as though the last decade of cultural and social reassessment had never taken place.

We, the undersigned, strongly object to the collusion of the De Young and Whitney Museums and John D. Rockefeller III in using a private collection of art, with its discriminatory omissions, to promote upper class values and a socially reactionary view of American art history.

Several of us met on December 5 with Tom Armstrong, director of the Whitney, to discuss our objections to this show. We stressed that such a celebration of exploitation and acquisition was hardly an appropriate homage to our long-buried revolution. Mr. Armstrong instinctively resorted to bureaucratic diversionary tactics, stated *"I'm not willing to go into a dialogue with you or your groups,"* and left us completely unsatisfied. On December 8, a larger art community meeting was called to discuss possible actions against the Whitney and other museums and cultural institutions around the nation which are using the Bicentennial to reinforce the values, taste, prestige and power of the ruling class.

Not incidentally, the Whitney is the only museum in New York City never to have made use of Black professional staff in curatorial or even sub-curatorial rank, despite promises to the Black **Emergency Cultural Coalition** by the previous administration. The museum's major Bicentennial extravaganza—*Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture*—was selected by seven curators; four of them guests, none of them Black. The exhibition schedule through 1978 includes only two shows in which Black artists are expected to exhibit. Nor, despite gains on the Feminist front provoked by lengthy protests in the Winter of 1970-71, is there a single full-scale one-woman exhibition planned in that period.

We object to the increasingly wide-spread museum policy of presenting and celebrating the private collections of art of the upper class. Such curatorial faits accomplis can only serve to abrogate the social responsibilities of these cultural institutions.

In addition to these points—particularly the important one of the inflexible use of private collections—exhibitions like the Rockefeller Collection raise broader social and cultural issues: the prevailing view of art as a commodity in this society, what it means to participate at all in Official Culture, the responsibility of the artists' community to the general public, and whether the current cultural institutions are the proper mediators between artist and public, communities and their culture. Abominations similar to that of the Rockefeller Collection are being perpetuated in your communities for the Bicentennial. By joining together we can be nationally effective and end the cynical political manipulation of our art and the history of American art.

We will be picketing the Whitney on January 3, 1976 at 2:00 p.m. Additional strategies to be employed in the next year include: picketing to coincide with key American history holidays, alternative street exhibitions and an alternative catalogue, a slide show for educational purposes and letters to Congresspersons. This letter is the first step in setting up a national network to protest such misuse of art and artists for the Bicentennial—and afterwards.

We urge you to join in our discussions and participate wherever you are and on whatever level you are able to. We welcome both practical and ideological suggestions. What are you opinions? Can you mobilize other artists and/or groups to participate and sign this petition? Can you copy this petition and distribute it more broadly in your state or community? What are the problems in your area? How can we help you deal with them?

If you have $5 or $10 send that too; we need money to continue these mailings and cover the costs of advertisements and printing. Make checks payable to *Artists Meeting for Cultural Change* and mail to: *P.O. Box 728 c/o The Fox, Canal Street Station, New York, N.Y. 10013.*

December 14, 1975.

Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee
Art & Language
Art Worker's News
Artists & Writers Protest
Black Emergency Cultural Coalition
Creative Women's Collective
The Fox
Guerrilla Art Action Group
W.E.B.
Women in the Arts
Women's Art Registry

Carl Andre
Benny Andrews
Rudolf Baranik
Arnold Belkin
Karl Beveridge
Camille Billops
Willie Birch
Vivian Browne
Ian Burn
Sarah Charlesworth
Michael Chisholm
Carole Conde
Michael Corris
Peter Frank
Leon Golub
Hans Haacke
Suzanne Harris
Alex Hay
Preston Heller
Elizabeth Hess
Jene Highstein
Leandro Katz
Joseph Kosuth
Nigel Lendon
Sol LeWitt
Lucy Lippard
Andrew Menard
Irving Petlin
Mel Ramsden
Ginny Reath
Miriam Schapiro
Joan Semmel
Jackie Skiles
Pat Steir
May Stevens
Mayo Thompson

June 30, 1976

Dr. EP Richardson

Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Dr. Richardson,

We of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, an organisation of Black artists dedicated to seeing to it that the cultural contributions made by Afro-Americans get their fair and due recognition in America, would like to put some questions to you.

1. How do you, listed as the person who selected the works for the upcoming exhibition of American Art owned by Mr John D Rockefeller III, feel about the exclusion of Black artists from the exhibition?

2. Of the reported 60 works you decided not to include in the exhibition (incidentally I'm speaking of the exhibition being shown at the MH de Young Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art), were there any works by black artists?

3. Do you feel that works by artists like Edmonia Lewis, Robert S.Duncanson, Edward M.Bannister, Henry O.Tanner, Horace Pippin, Jake Lawrence, Richard Hunt, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Al Loving, Raymond Saunders, Ellen Banks, Alma Thomas, Betye Saar, and Sam Gilliam to be of inferior quality to works selected for this exhibition?

4. Do you feel that a museum like the Whitney Museum of American Art should be concerned about questions of discrimination against American artists, or do you feel that it is above such things and should feel free to ignore such charges if it feels that it is in need of financial aid for its exhibition programs?

5. Do you feel that there is something wrong with celebrating the 200 years of independence of America, a country that has made much ado about its fairness, decency and opportunities for oppressed people, and <u>not</u> include the cultural contributions made by so many artists who happen to be born Black?

6. Do you feel that organisations like this one, or individual artists have legitimate and moral grounds to question people like you and institutions about exhibitions like this one?

7. Do you feel that this exhibition will serve to distort the cultural contributions made by some of the artists listed on the other side of the aisles of America's past, the one's of Black skin, when the expected thousands of less informed people view an exhibition called two or three hundred years of American art and <u>no</u> Black artist is included?

8. Do you feel that the Black people in the arts have made any contributions to America?

There are many more questions that we could ask you, but if you would be so kind as to give us the benefit of you thoughts about the ones above, we would greatly appreciate it.

You might think it strange that we're asking such questions, but honestly, after seeing the works selected for the exhibition we cannot find any reason in the world for you and others to have left out Black artists completely. Therefore we're asking you to please let us know your thinking on this, maybe we've missed something. Thanking you in advance for your response to our questions,

Respectfully yours,

Benny Andrews
Co-Chairman

E. P. RICHARDSON

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

July 14, 1976

Mr. Benny Andrews
The Black Emergency Cultural Council
463 West Street
New York, New York 10014

Dear Mr. Andrews:

Your letter expressing your concern for the well-being of black artists deserves a thoughtful answer.

Your questions are addressed to an exhibition chosen as a national survey of talent today. This is a misunderstanding. When I was director of a public museum in Detroit, we exhibited, and acquired, the works of black artists, past and present (including one good living painter whose name I am sorry not to see on your list), as a normal part of our effort to form a representative collection of American art.

The collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd is not of that kind. It was acquired over a long period of years with no thought that it would be shown in a bicentennial year. The Rockefellers were asked to lend some of their pictures to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and agreed afterward that they could be shown in New York. So far as Mr. Rockefeller is concerned, this might have happened in 1970, or 1980. What the exhibition represents is a deep interest in the work of American artists by a thoughtful private collector.

I emphasize the words private collector. Not a museum, nor an encyclopedia, nor an attempt to review all the talent in the USA. In selecting these examples I tried to give a fair sample of what one man has chosen to live with every day. Look on it as one man's statement, "There are great values in American art and great talents among our people. These are some that I have found, that I enjoy and admire." That is what the exhibition says.

I believe you will agree that an exhibition making such a statement has its own validity. I believe you will agree that no one can, or should, say to such a private individual, "You have no right to lend your pictures to a public gallery unless you lend pictures by the artists we are interested in."

Yours very sincerely,

E P Richardson

E. P. Richardson

ARTISTS UNITE!

PROTEST

Rockefeller's Bicentennial Exhibition:
"Three Centuries of American Art"
STOP RACISM & SEXISM

JOIN THE PICKET: Thursday, Feb. 26th
Whitney Museum, 11:30 am – 1:30 pm
Rockefeller Center, 2:00 pm

ARTISTS MEETING FOR CULTURAL CHANGE
P.O. BOX 551 NYC 10013

11:30 Friday
Picket at MOMA

MOMA & GUGGENHEIM AD HOC PROTEST COMMITTEE

Demonstration at the Whitney Museum
PHOTO:
JIM ALEXANDER
MARY ELLEN ANDREWS
PHOTO MONTAGE
ART WORKERS NEWS

BOYCOTT THIS SHOW!

The De Young Museum of San Francisco and John D. Rockefeller III have collaborated on selecting from his private collection: 'American Art'. (Sic) In our initial protest against this particular exhibition and the policies that make this kind of exhibition possible in general, Artists Meeting for Cultural Change enumerated the crimes of cultural institutions like the Whitney Museum of American Art in accepting and promoting 'American Art' as if it were simply what it says it is.

Among the outrages charged are:

■ A staff of experts constructing a 'history' of American art from the viewpoint of the ruling class; a 'history' that systematically ignores not only 'the last decade of cultural and social reassessment' but worse: the entire history of people struggling and organizing for social/cultural transformation.

■ This show attempts to pass off as representative a private, discriminatory collection of art. 'American Art' only succeeds in representing the values of John D. Rockefeller III and his class. This is accomplished with the complicity of cultural institutions with a legal obligation to remain politically neutral and to consciously reflect the social realities of all of the people.

■ This exhibition has in it the work of only one woman and no blacks. This is particularly offensive in light of the past Whitney administration promises to the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition to at least make use of professional black curatorial staff in curatorial or even sub-curatorial ranks and the hard-won advances of women in all sections of society. To these promises the present Whitney administration obviously feels no obligation.

Why protest? Because our social section has an obligation with respect to the general problems of these 'point of production' struggles. This reflects the terrain of contradiction which must be dealt with respect to social responsibility.

Rockefeller, the De Young and Whitney Museums, etc. appropriate people's work in their attempts to perpetuate both a specific and a general concept of Official Culture. They promote art as a set of commodities. They conceal and confuse the class character of art and art practice.

AMCC

Photos by Mary Ellen Andrews

BOYCOTT THIS MUSEUM!

The Whitney Museum is a privately owned institution, but through federal grants and a permanent tax-exemption, you pay for it. In return for your investment, the Whitney is obligated by law to be a politically neutral educational institution. What you actually get are the private interests and values of the ruling class.

Exhibitions such as the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III Collection of American Art share in determining an Official Culture for the United States which only reflects the taste and attitudes of the Rockefellers and others of their class. The fact that this show, with one exception, contains only the work of white male artists, clearly demonstrates the racist and sexist policies of the ruling class and "their" institutions. They would have us believe that our country is a product of personal initiative and foresight, but, the fact is, this country was built by waves of immigrants of many nationalities and races who were used as cheap labor. This collection of American Art and this museum are owned by the same people who benefited and continue to benefit from that labor power. It helps to perpetrate a myth of America we know to be untrue. This myth presents the views of the ruling class as the only correct ones. We protest the fact that museums are being used to exclude all but the ruling class from active participation in the development of culture. The museum removes art from its social context thereby forcing a separation between people and their history. Rockefeller and the Whitney Museum appropriate people's work in their attempts to promote an Official Culture that isolates art from its history, denying it its social function and reducing it to nothing more than a commodity.

In the past, there have been attempts to make the Whitney socially responsive. Those protests centered on the hiring and exhibition policies of the museum. At that time, the Whitney promised to, at least, make use of professional black curatorial staff in curatorial or even sub-curatorial ranks and to develop a non-sexist and non-racist exhibition policy. The Whitney has no intention of honoring those promises, and has instead become increasingly biased in its practices.

We ask you to join us; together we can force the Whitney to fulfill its obligation to reflect a social reality other than that of the ruling class.

THE POLITICAL CONTROL OF CULTURE IS A CLASS PROBLEM

WE DEMAND THAT THE WHITNEY KEEP ITS PROMISES

WE DEMAND CHANGE

WE DEMAND THAT THE MUSEUM RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE

IF YOU SUPPORT OUR ACTION, PLEASE WRITE A LETTER OF PROTEST TO: THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART.

ARTISTS MEETING FOR CULTURAL CHANGE

BOX 551, CANAL STREET STATION, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10013

Avant-Garde?

In 1871 'radical art' wasn't a question of style.

On May 16, 1871, the workers and artists of the Paris Commune toppled the Victory Column at the Place Vendome. This monument to despotism and imperialism was seen as a cultural and political affront to the revolutionary movement. The achievements of the Commune included the formation of an Artist's Federation organized to free the arts from the domination of the bourgeoisie.

If you think art is 'neutral' you're kidding yourself-- and ignoring history.

Artists Meeting for Cultural Change examines the political nature of culture--how it is used, and how it uses us. We can actively oppose and change the existing structure of society. Come Sunday nights at 8:00 to Artists Space, 155 Wooster Street.

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Founded 1930 by Gertrude V. Whitney
945 Madison Avenue at Seventy-Fifth Street New York, New York 10021 (212) ~~249-4100~~ 794-0649

November 10, 1976

Dear Sir or Madam,

The library would like to place an order for your counter-catalog for the Rockefeller show at the Whitney Museum. When the catalog is ready for distribution, please let me know and I will forward a $10.00 contribution.

Sincerely,
Arno Kastner
Arno Kastner, Librarian

Unlike most catalogs, this *anti*-catalog is not a listing of valuable objects or a definitive statement of what is or is not significant art. Rather, it consists of written and pictorial essays that address questions about the historical and ideological function of American art. Contents:

The Project *6* A Statement *7* Mr. Catlin and Mr. Rockefeller Tame the Wilderness *8* Demystifying American Art *10* John Brown *22* The Love of Art and the Art of Public Relations *24* "It's my wall." "But it's my building." *28* Paughtraits *30* To Have and Have Not *41* Black Art and Historical Omission *42* The Politics of No Ideas *48* Looking for Women in the Rockefeller Collection *52* Three Kinds of Charity *66* Documents *68*