

History of the Permanent Collection

Over the last thirty-five years, the permanent collection of the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art has grown steadily from an original nucleus of less than 100 objects to a diverse cache of some 4,000 works of art. In accordance with the Museum's mission, the SAMA collection has emphasized American art and the regional art of Pennsylvania. Its American holdings range from the eighteenth century to the present, and include important artists such as William Baziotes, Albert Bierstadt, Mary Cassatt, Thomas Moran, John Sloan, Gilbert Stuart, and Thomas Sully, among others. Significant regional artists include Franklin Briscoe, Frederick Counsel, George Hetzel, and William Rau. Although its strengths are mainly in the areas of traditional fine arts, the collection also includes outstanding examples of decorative arts, particularly in the field of glass. Certain special collections of objects, notably the Rezk Collection of Tibetan and Nepalese art, fall outside of the Museum's American focus; as such, however, they provide an instructive counterpart to the history, philosophy, and visual culture of the West.

From the beginning, the SAMA collection was intended as an educational survey representing the canon of American art. Museum founder and first president, Sean M. Sullivan, T.O.R., shaped its basic framework through the establishment of the Frank and Margaret Sullivan Fund, which from 1973 to the present has provided the Museum with some of its most highly regarded objects. These gifts represent milestones in the history of American art, and include characteristic media such as painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, and sculpture. Among the Sullivan Fund's early gifts are Albert Bierstadt's *Lake Tahoe*, Paul Cadmus' *Male Nude*, Mary Cassatt's *The Somber One*, Walt Kuhn's 1926 *Acrobat*, and the fine large charcoal drawing of *M. Emile Verhaeren* by John Singer Sargent. All of these works entered the collection before the Museum first opened its doors to the public in 1976.

Early on, Sullivan's precedent attracted other key gifts. Notable among these are Charles Burchfield's *The Lonely Chimney*, presented to the Museum by Mr. and Mrs. William Aloe; John Marin's *Brooklyn Bridge – On the Bridge*, given by Lawrence A. and Barbara Fleischman; and John Sloan's *Bright Rocks, Gloucester*, given in honor of Gunard and Margaret Carlson by the Gunard Berry Carlson Memorial Foundation. Milton

Avery's Nude with Orange Scarf, together with Mary Jane Peale's historically significant portraits of Rubens and Eliza Burd Patterson Peale, were added to the collection through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. James W. Titelman. St. Francis College (now University) and the Franciscan Friars donated or loaned in perpetuity several important works at this time, including William Baziot's untitled abstract composition of 1946, and sculptor Thomas Dow Jones' life bust of *Abraham Lincoln*.

The Museum's longstanding commitment to western Pennsylvania artists is also reflected in early gifts. These include Pittsburgh sculptor Peter Calaboyias' *Power Symbol*, given by an anonymous donor; Frederick Counsel's *Boys with Guitar*, presented to the Museum by Counsel's niece, painter Judith Counsel Vipond; and Gary Spinosa's *Life Force of the Fields*, acquired through the Frank and Margaret Sullivan Fund. Area artists began to donate their own work to the Museum as well, laying the groundwork for what is now one of the most comprehensive collections of contemporary Pennsylvania art.

Although the gifting of art played a preeminent role in the initial growth of the permanent collection, the Museum itself made certain purchases to help round out the collection's parameters. With the help of early benefactors, SAMA developed an art acquisition fund which, during the 1970s, was used to make strategic purchases of American works on paper. The largest and most important of these was the complete series of *New York City Life* etchings by John Sloan. Another major purchase was Ralph Woehrman's monumental drawing, *Abraham Lincoln*, which entered the permanent collection in 1978.

By 1980, the Museum had formed the outlines of a respectable and comprehensive collection of American and regional art. Exhibitions in Roger Ferri's innovative gallery space had begun to draw added attention to the institution, and as art interest reached new heights over the course of the decade, the SAMA collection continued to grow and diversify. New supporters came alongside the Museum's early benefactors, enhancing the breadth of the permanent collection through their own interests as connoisseurs and collectors; at the same time, new acquisition endowment funds expanded the purchasing power of SAMA itself. The 1980s also saw a new trend toward the donation of discrete groups of art objects, a number of which became the Museum's first special collections.

Highlights among the individual art objects received during the 1980s include Charles Burchfield's *Hump Operations*, given by an anonymous donor; Thomas Eakins' photograph of Walt Whitman, given by Mr. and Mrs. Titelman; a series of early photographs by André Kertész, placed on permanent loan by St. Francis College; and a complete set of Jacob Lawrence's *Legend of John Brown* silkscreen prints, donated by Audrey and Chester Cunningham in memory of Marian McLaughlin. From Mr. and Mrs. Earl M. Latterman came the Museum's first piece of outdoor sculpture, *Players*, by Lila Katzen. Typical of Katzen's mature work of the 1970s, this aluminum and steel piece complemented earlier gifts of sculpture from the Frank and Margaret Sullivan Fund, including José de Creeft's *Sueño* and Milton Hebard's *James Joyce Monument Study*.

The R.K. Mellon family emerged as a notable benefactor of the permanent collection beginning in the mid-1980s. Through the establishment of the R.K. Mellon Family Foundation Art Acquisition Endowment Fund, the Museum greatly increased its ability to purchase art for the permanent collection. Among the first purchases made through the fund were several bronzes by Walter Matia, noted for his sculptures of birds. An important early addition to the Museum's collection of American prints, *Albi*, by John Taylor Arms, was also among the first acquisitions made through the Mellon fund.

Margery Wolf-Kuhn and the Wolf family provided a second significant acquisition fund at this time, further extending the Museum's reach in the art marketplace. Early purchases made through the Margery Wolf-Kuhn Art Acquisition Endowment Fund consisted primarily of prints by twentieth-century American masters, and include such notable works as *Cradling Wheat* by Thomas Hart Benton, *The Faller* by Rockwell Kent, and *Merry-Go-Round* by Reginald Marsh. Margery Wolf-Kuhn herself bequeathed a group of French and American paintings to the Museum, including a collection of genre studies by Charles Mairret and several fine canvases by American Impressionist Emile Walters.

In addition to the gifts of individuals and families, groups of donors banded together to form the SAMA Collectors Club, which presented the Museum with a number of fine works on paper beginning in 1987. These range from early works such as James A. McNeill Whistler's etching, *Billingsgate*, to large color prints by modern masters including Romare Bearden (*Jamming at the Savoy*), Philip Pearlstein (*Nude on Bamboo*), and Robert Rauschenberg (*Homage to Frederick Kiesler*). During its several years of existence, the Collector's Club not only significantly enhanced the Museum's print

collection, but also facilitated the purchase of several watercolors and drawings by Barbara Strank Zivkovich, an important regional artist associated with Johnstown.

In 1985, the Museum formally acquired its first special collections. The first of these, presented to SAMA by Mark del Costello, numbers more than 400 posters and commercial prints dating mainly from the 1960s to the 1980s. A survey of contemporary American graphic design, it represented a departure from traditional museum collecting, and is today a rare resource for the study of this distinct art form. Acquired at the same time, the Charles M. Schwab collection was the gift of Bethlehem Steel, which became one of America's great corporations under Schwab's leadership during the early decades of the twentieth century. Presentation silver and other small decorative arts associated with Schwab make up the bulk of the collection, which is valued both as a historical and cultural legacy.

The permanent collection grew significantly during the 1990s as individual gifts, art acquisition funds, bequests, and additional special collections increased both the depth and breadth of the Museum's holdings. As the Museum approached its twentieth anniversary in 1996, both old and new supporters came forward with outstanding gifts to mark the occasion. Among these is Ben Shahn's *Disturbed Man*, given by Gail Binney-Stiles; Thomas Sully's *Portrait of Lord David Montague Erskine*, given by Mr. and Mrs. John T. Jacobus; and Francine Tint's *Blue Mink*, presented by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Coppola. Glenna Goodacre's bronze *River Woman* was donated by Mr. and Mrs. David P. O'Neill, and Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Dean Nelson added an expansive *Scalp Level Landscape* by Alfred S. Wall to complement George Hetzel's *Woodland Stream, Scalp Level*, which had entered the collection in 1991 through the R.K. Mellon Family Foundation Art Acquisition Fund. Other fine gifts of this period include Wayman Adams' *Portrait of George Laughlin III*, donated by William R. Blair; William Merritt Chase's *Max Bensil*, given anonymously in honor of Michael Strueber; and Gene Davis' *20 Fathoms/Sky*, also an anonymous gift.

The 1990s were particularly rich in gifts of photography, both vintage and contemporary. Jack Barnosky, noted for his documentary images of Pennsylvania coal mining, presented the Museum with an extensive series of his own photographs, while an anonymous donor gave a similarly large group of works by fellow Pennsylvanian Gerald Erro Gutshall. These works complement a group of early steel industry photographs by Luke Swank, given by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Wilson. Monique

Goldstrom, Steve Wilson, and Rochelle Wilson enriched the collection with a number of noteworthy gifts, including photographs by Berenice Abbott, Esther Bubley, Carleton Watkins, Edward Weston, and Clarence White. A group of donors, including Susan Bender, Peggy Bennington, Monique Goldstrom, and Julie and Charles Irsch, gave a large number of vintage photogravures by famed Indian photographer Edward Curtis. The decade also saw the first of many generous gifts by Pittsburgh photographer Donald M. Robinson, who has since made the Museum the chief repository of his work.

The early Robinson gifts form the core of the Donald M. Robinson Collection, which at present numbers in excess of 800 photographs taken in more than 60 countries around the globe. The 1990s also saw the addition of the Walter Carlyle Shaw Collection, which features a comprehensive selection of antique and modern paperweights by some of the world's foremost glass artisans. Other distinctive bodies of glass objects received during this period include the Frank and Margaret Sullivan collection of modern glass paperweights and the Nicholas Unkovic Collection, featuring dozens of Steuben ornamentals produced between 1940 and 1980.

Perhaps the most unusual of the Museum's special collections is the Rezk Collection of Tibetan and Nepalese art. Spanning some 800 years of Buddhist art and culture, the Rezk collection includes some 90 paintings, prints, sculpture, and ritual objects that form a striking counterpart to the art of the West. At the time of its acquisition in the early 1990s, the collection was considered to be well outside of the Museum's collecting mission. Yet its importance as a resource was immediately recognized, and accordingly, the Museum's mission statement was modified, allowing SAMA to serve "as a repository for distinctive collections."

It was during this remarkable period of growth in the 1990s that a new kind of supporter began to play a prominent role in augmenting the permanent collection. Art galleries and their principals donated a number of outstanding works or, alternately, facilitated gifts directly from leading painters, printmakers, photographers and sculptors. William Meek of the Harmon-Meek Gallery in Naples, Florida, has been among the most energetic of these, and through his efforts, SAMA has acquired art objects from nationally-recognized artists such as Will Barnet, Colleen Browning, Walter Meigs, Wallace Herndon Smith, and Robert Vickrey, among others. An important and extensive retrospective collection of prints by Adolf Dehn, the gift of Virginia Dehn, was also arranged by the Harmon-Meek Gallery. From other galleries

came significant gifts as well, including John Hultberg's paintings, *Mexican* and *Wrecked Car*, from Anderson Gallery; Alice Neel's serigraph, *Young Woman* from Kennedy Galleries; and Louise Nevelson's screenprint, *Lullaby for Jumbo*, from G.W. Einstein Company. Sam Berkovitz of Pittsburgh's Concept Gallery, Larry Becker Contemporary Art of Philadelphia, and John Szoke Graphics likewise stepped forward with significant gifts of art at this time.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, SAMA had amassed a respectable survey of both national and regional art. Yet over the course of the last ten years, the collection has continued to grow, and new gifts added which strengthen weak areas and expand the boundaries of the Museum's holdings. Recent highlights include a group of drawings by Pennsylvania Impressionist Milton Herbert Bancroft, given by Joseph and Barbara Mack; a group of photographs by Hank O'Neal, donated by Elsie Hillman; Michael Strueber's *A Bouquet for C*, donated by the artist; and Gilbert Stuart's *Portrait of Captain Joseph Anthony*, presented by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Sullivan. From the Frank and Margaret Sullivan Fund comes paintings by Walt Kuhn, Thomas Moran, and Anthony Thieme; drawings by Jared French, Martin Lewis, and James Sharples; and prints by William Morris Hunt, Benton Spruance, and George Tooker, to name a few among many recent gifts.

Major gifts of prints have entered the collection through the generosity of Allwyn and Ellen Levine and Gerald P. and Aline D. Wolf. Among the Levine gifts are a group of lithographs by Leonard Baskin and large contemporary prints by Jim Dine, Janet Fish, Jane Freilicher, David Hockney, Alex Katz, and Fairfield Porter. Complementing these, the Wolf gifts include fine examples of twentieth-century American masters including Thomas Hart Benton, Mary Cassatt, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Louis Lozowick, and Raphael Soyer.

The last decade has also seen generous gifts from the families and descendants of noted artists. Shirley Zampelli Sturtz-Davis has given numerous examples of drawings and prints by her husband, William D. Davis, while the family of Edward Glannon recently donated a representative group of his paintings and prints. Barbara Mayo-Wells greatly expanded the Museum's photography collection with a historically important gift of family portraits and landscapes by her ancestors George and William Herman Rau. Geoffrey Wagner, the husband of painter Colleen Browning, built on earlier gifts of the artist when in 2010 he bequeathed to the Museum a major collection of more than 100

paintings, drawings, and memorabilia spanning Browning's life and career. This material makes up the bulk of SAMA's most recent special collection, and is the focus of a major traveling exhibition planned for 2011-2013.

As the Museum enters its thirty-fifth year, the permanent collection may be said to be both representative and distinctive. Since the last catalogue of the collection was published in 1996, SAMA has greatly improved its survey of American art, adding many works that not only round out nineteenth- and twentieth-century holdings, but which extend the collection into the eighteenth century and the beginnings of our national art history. Certain areas of the collection, notably prints and photography, have become especially strong, and there has been significant growth in painting and sculpture as well. Increasing numbers of regional artists have offered work to the Museum in recent years, and as a result, SAMA's holdings in regional contemporary work are especially comprehensive. The Browning and Robinson collections have added greatly to the Museum's profile, and together with other special collections, they have helped to set SAMA apart as a unique cultural resource.

Yet there is still room for growth, and as the Museum moves toward the half-century mark, we expect to further refine and develop the permanent collection. The assistance of donors has and will always be central to this enterprise, and the present state of the collection is a testament to 35 years of consistent and exceptional generosity. We are grateful for the enthusiasm for the arts shown by SAMA's supporters, and are optimistic that it will only increase as we move forward into the future.