

towards the Metropolitan. I was satisfied with what I had done, also dissatisfied. I wanted to quit in full glory, but I wanted to hang on for glories and triumphs untold. From the moment of the Velázquez triumph, that ambivalence began to eat away at me.

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THE BIG “KERFUFFLE”

I had raised a rumpus in the press early on by stating that running the Met was no different from running General Motors. I had meant it. If you took the glamour away, the museum was just a business with all its excitement—and drudgery. I had started off my directorship wanting to make the Met into a crusading force, but I was coming around to the opinion that the institution had to be molded into an efficient business enterprise blessed with economic equilibrium.

I was convinced that I had eased the Met into the twentieth century with the establishment of the career and salary plan, the educational and outreach programs, and especially with the building plans. But there was far more to do to make the institution a finely tuned mechanism.

The revenue-producing opportunities were paying off handsomely by the end of my fourth year. Under the guidance of Brad Kelleher a new postcard shop had been constructed in the broad alley adja-

cent to the Grand Staircase. The earnings in the first months of operation outperformed our most ambitious projections. Franchising of sheets and other soft-goods items was gaining hearty revenues. I had even initiated reproductions of choice clothing from the Costume Institute—attractive dusters of the early twentieth century or evening dresses from the twenties—and printed a mail-order catalogue with lovely Marisa Berenson modelling the outfits. The initial orders were brisk, as were those of the burgeoning mail-order business in general. For the first time in years our budgets began to look favorable.

To me, a vital part of transforming the Met into a business was to make changes in the makeup of the board of trustees. After a quiet struggle I was able to accelerate the election to the board of the borough trustees I had suggested in the City Council hearing. Some of the interviews were madcap. At one plush luncheon in the director's dining room, trustee Dick Perkins asked Arnold Johnson, the proposed representative from Harlem, how he would solve the poverty and violence in the black districts of Brooklyn and Queens. Arnold, a Harlem businessman, sat stiffly and tried to explain that just because he was black didn't give him insights into every black weakness. Hell, he said, I'm not poor or violent. That observation probably elected him.

The proposed trustee from Staten Island, Muriel Silberstein, an art educator, dazzled Dillon and Dick Dilworth, and her performance made it easier for the rest of the borough trustees to enter the privileged fold. Swiftly, the board elected Sol Shaviro from the Bronx, Henry Saltzman from Brooklyn, and the former borough president of Queens, Judge Frank O'Connor, as the people's representatives. When they showed up at their first meeting and asked penetrating questions about the true goals of the institution and how the trustees supervised the running of the place, it became evident that we had gathered up the right crowd.

Joan Payson embraced the new board members, making a point of sitting near them and urging them to ask "dumb questions." It was typical for her. After Dillon and Houghton and Gilpatric, she was perhaps the finest trustee the Met ever had. The tiring old guard slowly passed into oblivion. A new structure was instituted so that the older members could not hang in for virtually unlimited terms.

Not that the troublemakers entirely disappeared. Roland Redmond, Francis Plimpton, and Mac Aldrich continued to chip away at the museum and at Dillon. Redmond dispatched one of his classic

diatribes against Dillon and Dilworth, claiming they had acted "illegally" in the funding of *Juan de Pareja*. Dilworth lost his temper, most unusually, and told Dillon that he thought Redmond was "crazy" and that unless the ex-president was put on "emeritus status" he would resign. "He's evil," Dilworth said. Redmond insisted that his motion to put a halt to future use of the principal of any Rogers funds for acquisitions be voted on by the full board. The measure was roundly defeated, and the only members in favor were Plimpton, Aldrich, Mary Whitehouse, and Redmond. We expected never to hear from them again. We were mistaken.

In a business nothing, clearly, is more important than a young, vigorous staff, and as luck would have it, a number of curators retired. I got rid of the deadwood in the Oriental Department and hired a vain and brilliant professor at Princeton University, Wen Fong. He had his supporters, one of whom was Dick Dilworth, and his severe detractors, most of whom were other Orientalists who did not favor his so-called wheeler-dealer image, his arrogance, and his technique of connoisseurship, which applied Western criteria to Chinese paintings; but that's precisely why I wanted him.

Initially, I suggested he dump Princeton and become the full-time chairman of the Oriental Department with power to restructure the staff and embark upon a crash program to attract donors and land great works of art. The wily scholar told me that he had made the "solemn pledge" to Princeton's president to create the finest Oriental center in American universities. With that I suddenly knew what he was angling for—he wanted to be the Oriental Man of the Nation. I offered him a dual role, keeping his Princeton post and becoming the consultative chairman of Oriental art. He seized the opportunity.

Within three weeks Wen Fong began to attract donors and treated the trustees as if they were assistants in his department. He subtly encouraged Douglas Dillon to collect in the field and scouted the world for acquisitions, not merely individual pieces, entire collections.

His derring-do with trustees was amazing. I had a hilarious lunch with Brooke Astor and Wen. Brooke began waving gaily to friends at nearby tables, until Wen admonished, "Brooke, it's time for business. Why don't you drop all those extraneous social projects your foundation is funding and throw all your money at the Met?" She gave a peal of laughter. With that, Brooke Astor's far-reaching financial support of the Oriental Department was born.

When some staff members departed for other posts, I actually felt

proud. What else was the museum for than the training ground for directors for the whole country? When Harry Parker left to run Dallas, I was elated for him. When Florens Deuchler told me he had to return to Switzerland to the life of a professor, I congratulated him. But I was even more pleased when I found talent inside the Met whom I could elevate, like Berry Tracy in the American Wing and Jock Howat for the department of American Paintings, Sculpture, and Watercolors. On the resignation of the registrar I appointed my former assistant and archivist John Buchanan to the post. Few people on the staff were as bright and quick.

When Jack Phillips, the rumpled chairman of the department of Western European Arts, retired, I was in Europe with Olga Raggio on a buying trip. I told her gravely that we were about to start a worldwide search for Phillips' replacement. Her face froze. I quickly added that the search had just ended and she was it. She became the first woman chairperson in the history of the Met. Within a couple of months she had pointed out a number of spectacular purchases and had given me a sensitive paper, outlining what should be done to still the burgeoning staff complaints in her department. Her recommendations on how to appease the dissidents had merit. Except in one case. This was a curator named Jessie McNab Dennis, who had vowed to create a curators' union. Jessie's tactics could try one's soul. At one Acquisitions Committee meeting we had just sat down for dinner after the curators had made their presentations, when half a dozen men and women burst through the *boiserie* doors of the de Tesse room chanting slogans: "Trustee power to the people!" "The Elite must go!" "We want *elected* trustees!" and "Trustees are pigs!"

The leader opened a jelly jar over the table and scattered a herd of cockroaches onto the surface.

Charlie Wrightsman plucked a solid crystal ashtray from the table—it must have weighed half a pound and had sharp corners—and wrapped it in a napkin, ready to split open the head of any protester who dared shout at him. I clamped my hand firmly over his.

The guards swooped in and the radicals were ejected. Charlie was furious. "I'd have been perfectly within my rights to crown one of those bastards!" The invasion accomplished its mission. The next day the newspapers reported on the affair.

I decided not to initiate an investigation. That would have played into the protesters' hands. Though privately I called Jessie the Joan

of Arc of the Met and was continually irked by her, I came to bless the day she had taken on the task of labor organizing. Our labor lawyer, Carl Schwartz, agreed. "Without Jessie, the union might win. If you didn't have her, you'd have to invent her."

And in one respect Dennis was right. There was labor discontent in some areas of the museum. My personnel director, John Conger, outlined an alarming picture of employee problems. It was not that a majority of curatorial employees were dissatisfied, just that the right number of dedicated "union lovers" had gathered together and might have the strength to force a union on a majority. He urged me to make reforms with the help of Schwartz, and we did, from electing representatives to attend trustees meetings, to sessions in which Dillon, myself, and the top staff would explain our decision making. The reforms gave birth to an entity called the Staff Federation. The federation compelled sweeping changes in the powers of the staff in art museums across the country and became the standard by which the profession now conducts its affairs and works with trustees.

The federation was, of course, a house union, but it had the advantage of giving the curators a greater degree of representation and independence than any governmentally sanctioned entity. The powerful chieftain of the city's municipal workers' union, Victor Gottbaum, objected to the Staff Federation and sought a secret election whereby I would permit him, without balloting, to form a curators' bargaining unit. I was in a quandary. But Schwartz took a daring risk. For the first time, or so he surmised, he had management petition the National Labor Relations Board for a union election. The votes came in seventy percent against a union, and Gottbaum told me that the Met would never have a curators' bargaining unit of any kind.

The union affair was not bloodless. I had beseeched the trustees to allow me to lay off about ten percent of the staff in order to make our financial footings stronger, and I did so before the NLRB "umbrella" came into play, moments before the election. I fired sixty-three staff members, a few of whom were union sympathizers. The NLRB sued, but Schwartz was relaxed about the action, saying, "Don't worry, in a year it'll end up with having to take back two or three—a gesture." He was right. Our union moves turned out to be excellent business.

It was also good business, I figured, to weed out the management staff as well. The first one on my list was second-in-command Joseph

Noble. He was convinced that he had an excellent chance of succeeding me.

He had always believed that I wouldn't last much longer: I might be ousted or go off to re-enter politics. We tolerated each other warily. When did I begin to sense that Noble and Arthur Houghton were conspiring? I sensed it in small things. They always had their heads together in the moments before and after board meetings. When I ambled over, they would dart away from each other. I decided to test out my suspicion by telling Noble some highly confidential and phony stories and then watch Arthur Houghton. Within a week or two I recognized that Houghton had to have been told. I asked for a meeting with Houghton at Steuben and without preamble accused him and Noble of "going behind my back." Houghton gazed at me dolefully for a long time, sucking heavily on his cigarette, and finally gave a shrug and said, "Yes, I did. I was wrong. I'm to blame. I suppose Joe has to go."

I nodded.

Joseph Noble left and was soon elected the director of the Museum of the City of New York. He turned into a dynamo, shook up the staff, obtained new trustees, initiated some effective fund-raising campaigns, and demonstrated a creativity in areas where he had been less than supportive at the Met.

The second ax to fall on a high level was on George Trescher. George had seemed lost when the Centennial festivities came to a close. Elevated to the new post of vice-director for public affairs—a large suzerainty—George was still frustrated. Never a team player, George found it hard to fit in with the overall administration.

He acquired the habit of making end runs around me, on projects he suspected I might question. He would keep quiet about what he was doing until it was virtually too late for me to change anything. When I asked him to give me a memo on what we could do in the area of fund-raising and development, he told me he wasn't sure he was interested in development. He got into a petty feud with Dan Herrick, the financial officer, about office space and seized a part of Herrick's area. When I was thinking of starting a summer restaurant at The Cloisters, I was surprised and irked to find that an acquaintance of George's might bid on the franchise.

The last straw was a fracas that almost had Charlie Wrightsman pull out of the museum. George had told me that Charlie wanted to honor the American premiere of two films on Impressionism made

by Kenneth Clark. George suggested a Tuesday, when the museum was open to the public, so Charlie could save some money on guards. The plan was to have a gala dinner for around fifty of Charlie and Jayne's intimate friends at seven o'clock in the Medieval Hall and then premiere the films in the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium at nine o'clock. I told George Tuesday was out: I didn't like the idea of a private dinner party going on behind screens while the public was in the museum. I could see another cockroach protest, this time far bigger.

To my astonishment, when I returned from a trip to the Soviet Union, I learned that the dinner party was all set for Tuesday at seven. George had dashed off a letter to Wrightsman saying that I enthusiastically endorsed the party. Trescher was away, so I ordered one of his aides to let Charlie know at once that the dinner had to be given on another night. Wrightsman soon called me, livid, threatening that he would remove all the works of art he had on loan and would sever all relationships with the museum. The collection was worth around fifty million dollars, and more importantly every piece had been acquired with a thought to filling our gaps.

I informed Wrightsman that I could not allow a private takeover of the public museum. As he yelled at me, I thought of an obvious solution. Why not show the films at seven o'clock—and hold the dinner later on after the public had left the museum, at nine? Jayne Wrightsman, listening in on the other phone, cut in to suggest that the guests would prefer to dine fashionably late. And so Charlie calmed down and said that his objects on loan would stay—"for now."

By luck, just as I had made up my mind to let George Trescher go, the perfect replacement walked into my office: It was Edward Warburg, wealthy scion of a distinguished family, a superbly educated, urbane, witty man, and a social thoroughbred. He had been one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art and had been active in a host of worthy causes ranging from the United Jewish Appeal to the City Ballet. I rather astonished him by suggesting that he become the vice-director for public affairs.

I spoke to Dillon, Dilworth, and Houghton—Trescher's main protector in the museum—about my decision to oust George. They had misgivings, especially Houghton, who said, "George's talented. He's dangerous, too. You'll be working with him in the future sometime, so whatever you do, make the exit happy—public relations—

wise." When I mentioned the name Eddie Warburg, they were delighted. Dilworth remarked, "Eddie may be worth as much as fifty million dollars in fund-raising from the Jewish community and the Warburg Foundation."

I patiently outlined my gripes to Trescher. I reminded him of his words when I had offered him the post of vice-director, that he would accept the job but wanted the time to assess if it would work for him. I said I guessed that allowed me to assess him and, as gently as I could, told him that I no longer needed him. He was dumbstruck and said, "Are you really telling me I'm fired?"

"You bet," I said.

Another serious management problem was my closest friend Ted Rousseau. The curators were furious at his organizational gaffes. He seemed to be oblivious to dampening the familial feuds that sputtered like Chinese firecrackers throughout the museum.

I was in a quandary. Any other employee I would have dismissed. But there were the complications, subtleties, and the contradictions of cronyism. There was our deep friendship, the gulf in our ages, and the perceptible slackening of his vitality. There was also my need for a strong chief curator, his never-ending playboy high jinks, his ability to flatter and cajole potential donors, his allies on the board, my almost desperate need for an understanding companion.

But then the Nathan Cummings affair exploded, and I came close to firing my dearest friend. Nate was affectionately called Mr. Diamond-in-the-Rough by his friends and a "vulgar bastard" by those who had been bested or shafted by him in business. Cummings was, with Norton Simon, the symbol of the seventies tycoon—a brash, social-climbing character, blessed with the Midas touch. His companies included General Foods and General Dynamics. He collected art, of course. In the sixties and seventies it was de rigueur. He also had a beautiful younger wife, Joanne.

Cummings yearned to have his collection shown at the Metropolitan. When he approached me, I told him bluntly that he had some fine Impressionist paintings, but not enough for a show at the Met. I told him that Ted and I would choose a dozen pieces and that those pictures would be most prominently displayed in the galleries of the upcoming Summer Loan show and singled out for praise in the catalogue.

Nate nodded his head at me and said in his machine-gun way of talking, "Sure, sure, yeah. I want a reception, of course, you know, a few of our absolutely closest friends."

I told him I'd think about the reception and threw the ball into Rousseau's court. Two weeks before the opening of the Summer Loan Show I received an invitation to attend an opening night party for the Nathan Cummings show at the Met.

I was livid. I had specifically told Rousseau before he left for vacation to tell Nat I did not want a splash. I phoned Cummings to tell him he could not have the party. He asked coyly, "How are we going to stop all the reporters from writing about it?" I advised him to contact his friends and the gossip columnists and say that he had called the bash off in deference to the economic climate. He said he'd try, but I expected further flak about the party.

A week before the opening Nate's curator complained about the presence of the works from other lenders, claiming to Rousseau's assistant that they had not been told about this. Nate roared that he was going to pull his paintings and dispatch "nine hundred telegrams to the people I have invited" not to come to the show—or the Metropolitan—again.

"Tom, my friend, what's gone wrong? Usually the museum's run so well. But we appear to have a terrible breakdown in communications. I swear I was never told about these other collectors. Ted never said a word. I paid for this show. How would you like it if you paid for a show and suddenly found out that a whole bunch of other collectors were going to come in for a free ride? I swear I heard nothing."

I reminded him that I had told him, but he claimed Ted had "changed all that." He had me there. I called Doug Dillon and briefed him about the disaster, and he ordered, "Work out some sort of compromise with the other collectors. I don't much like Nate's bullying, but the word of the museum is at stake."

I tried to reach Rousseau, but he was incommunicado, and ordered a flustered Ashton Hawkins and Rousseau's assistant, Michael Botwinick, to call the other collectors and get them to delay their participation. The solution to the mess was easier than we thought. Lender Henry Pearlman's beautiful paintings were not scheduled to arrive until a week after the proposed opening anyway, and the other lenders told us they understood about Cummings' prima donna behavior. I was on the phone a dozen times with Nate in the final days,

inching an agreement along. In the end he agreed to a complex series of openings in which he would be alone the first week and then share the second week *only* with John Powers, followed by the rest—Pearlman, Hillman, Bernard, and Levitt.

Dillon gloomily predicted that we would probably lose the support of Cummings and all the others as well. At last Rousseau sent a memo to Botwinick, accusing him of selling out to me and Dillon. Rousseau was adamant that he had told Cummings the precise arrangement of the show several times and that Nate was a "bastard and a cheapskate who will do nothing for the museum." He would not talk to the other collectors about bowing to Cummings' wishes but would urge them to pull out of the show if Cummings were granted "his special week."

I went wild at Rousseau's insubordination and instructed Ashton Hawkins to tell Ted that if he wanted to resign, then Dillon and I were ready to accept. And if he refused, Dillon and I would urge his early retirement. Rousseau, the canny diplomat, once again became unreachable.

One of the conditions I had imposed on Cummings was that all news announcements about his show would be issued through the museum. The day of the reception I was surprised by calls from a number of newspapers asking me to comment on the stupendous discovery of a Georges Rouault painting on the back of another owned by Nate Cummings in his "great Metropolitan exhibition" and was it true that the new Rouault was worth half a million dollars?

I called Nate and told him that I considered him a duplicitous son of a bitch and that I believed Ted Rousseau. I accused him of using the museum to increase the value of his "lousy" collection and condemned his Rouault ploy. I never heard from him again. The museum received none of his paintings, nor Henry Pearlman's either.

The only thing good about the disgraceful affair was that Ted and I became warm friends again. I told him to stay away from administrative activities and to stick to questions of art and exhibitions. He soon gave proof that he had not lost his touch. His newest mistress—one of three current favorites—had confided that the chairman of the Lehman Foundation, the octogenarian Ed Weisl, Sr., was in love with her and had suggested that I appoint her to the Met board. In exchange Weisl claimed he would guarantee that while he lived, he would steer the entire Lehman income to the museum, over a million

dollars instead of the three hundred and fifty thousand we were already receiving. I was tempted. I saw the advantage of having a board member under my chief curator's thumb, and I needed every penny I could raise. But, in time, thinking of the disadvantages, I turned the idea down. Soon Weisl passed away. And he struck back from the grave. Owing to his Democratic Party links, his son Ed Weisl, Jr., became Abe Beame's Parks commissioner, and, of course, trustee and landlord of the Met. One of his first announcements was that he was unhappy with my performance at the museum. He did not turn out to be dangerous.

Rousseau kept on arranging trips to Europe for the two of us and rounding up collectors and collections. One was Colonel Michael Paul. Louis Goldenberg of Wildenstein called Ted to say that Paul was eager to make another gift of sculpture from Wildenstein's, this time a fruity *Nymph* drying her hair on a large basin, a work of the late eighteenth century by the Frenchman Louis-Claude Vassé, hardly a household word and unknown to me. There was a slight catch. Paul, who had given the Met almost a dozen sculptures in the past five or six years, was insisting the museum share the costs. The price was a million dollars. Paul wanted the museum to commit to a quarter. He also wanted me to write to his foundation board members that the value of the pieces given over the years had more than doubled.

I was in a fix. The pieces weren't worth the ten million Paul's foundations had paid, much less twice that. We had always suspected that Paul somehow augmented his income with an arrangement with Wildenstein, one, of course, of a legitimate nature. There was nothing wrong in the Colonel receiving a finder's fee from the gallery. Still I had a sour taste in my mouth. Ted and Dillon both felt, what the hell, didn't we want Paul to put up the four and a half million dollars it would take to build a gallery Ted called the Paul Mall? So, don't irk the man—especially at his advanced age.

I drafted an oily letter praising the gifts and stating that the collection was easily worth twenty-two million dollars—perhaps more, since the whole was so much more valuable than the sum of its parts. I assured Paul separately that Dillon would urge the Acquisitions Committee to share in the great Vassé *Nymph*. Kevin Roche rushed to complete drawings and models for the "Paul Mall."

The Colonel was euphoric at the models of the garden court, so I smoothly told him that I wanted his foundation to pay for the garden

—only something like four million dollars and the payments could be given over time, after his death. I pointed out that four million was less than twenty percent of the twenty-two million the Paul collection was worth. He took the hint. He asked, "Would you be able to emboss—in large gold letters—on the cover the words 'The Josephine Bay Paul Memorial Gardens'?"

Of course!

Over the next few years we received a few more interesting sculptures from Colonel Michael Paul, including a fine marble by Jean-Antoine Houdon. On his death we were informed by his puzzled foundation officials that no one had ever heard of his instructions for three or four million dollars to fund a memorial garden.

One morning Rousseau told me exultantly that we had to go to Moscow one more time. Our earlier trips to coddle the officials in the Ministry of Culture had paid off. There was a thaw in the air between the United States and the Soviet Union triggered by Richard Nixon's initiatives in China. We were informed by a member of the Soviet consulate in New York that we ought to go at once to Moscow to press our case. I wanted Karl Katz, director of special exhibitions, to join us. Soon after the public hearing he had been hired.

Katz was shivering with anxiety as the hours before his flight with me to Moscow ticked down without the arrival of his visa. "They hate Jews in Russia," he muttered darkly. "You go and I'll wait here."

I told him I'd go with him or not at all and pooh-poohed his fears. He was not a target of discrimination, I lied; the Soviets were hopelessly inefficient. At the last moment the visa arrived—the Soviets said it had been sent to the wrong place. I didn't believe the explanation for a moment and took care to keep a special watch out for Karl.

The only way to visit the Soviet Union was with a smile pasted on your face and a relaxed attitude. Nothing worked. The bureaucracy was surreal. The first words out of anybody's mouth were either "no" or "not possible." You had to ease in, stay loose, keep your sense of humor, and only when absolutely necessary lose your temper. When you chose to do so—and the tantrum should always be contrived—then the explosion had to be volcanic. It was important never to be worn down by the constant barrage of petty slights and mess-ups.

The way you were treated upon arrival at Sheremetyev Airport in Moscow was like a refugee or a criminal. As you left the plane and climbed into the dilapidated bus spewing out raw diesel smoke into your lungs, you became fearful that you'd lost one of your documents—the visa, health certificate, passport, or currency declaration—and would be sent God knows where.

As we bumped along in the bus on the way to the terminal, I joked to Katz that one of three things would happen when we got inside—our luggage would be lost, our documents would not be in order so that we'd have to return to London without the luggage, or we'd be allowed in but Intourist would have lost our rooms and we'd have to sleep on the cold marble floor of the horrid Rossia Hotel.

The Intourist chap had a clipboard with a sheaf of papers tallying up the tourists coming that day with the names of the hotels. Although you could suggest the one you wanted, they assigned you one. I always preferred the National, the faded art nouveau pile on Manezh Square across from Lenin's tomb, which had a *gemütlich* hard-currency dining room and a congenial bar and rooms with huge ceilings and outrageous faux-Victorian furniture. The Intourist chap searched for our names. We were not on the list.

We sat around for two hours when I told the clerk I suddenly remembered I had gotten a Telex assuring me that we *did* have accommodations in the National. I was banking on the fact that Ted Rousseau had already arrived and had talked his way in. Luckily, he had and his room was huge with a sitting room spacious enough for two cots. I got our luggage out of the waiting limo—we were traveling deluxe of course—and told the lady in charge of rooms that we'd bunk in with our companion. "No!" she screamed. "Not possible!" The room was not luxurious enough, and we had paid in advance for luxury accommodations.

It was time for a tantrum. I shouted and shoved a bunch of documents in the woman's face. We were official guests of the Ministry of Culture. We had an appointment to meet Khrushchev, I shouted. We would complain to the Politburo. Alternatingly, Ted played Mr. Nice Guy, plying her with compliments. When he pulled out a Chanel lipstick—Ted's Russian gifts ran to cosmetics while mine ran to things like windshield wipers—she began to melt. She said she'd accompany us to Ted's room to see if it were "luxurious" enough. Out of the car came the bags, up again five flights. Madame "Rooms" gave in, by this time reduced to giggles from Ted's honeyed compliments.

In a week we conducted a flurry of meetings with ministry functionaries—Baturov, Maturin, Masurov, and Butrova—and the indomitable Furtseva. Ted and I were astonished at how smoothly the discussions went. It was obvious that the Politburo itself had blessed the exchange. I had experienced a stroke of luck just before departing. Governor Rockefeller had invited me to fly up in his plane to Rochester and hear an address by Nixon on revenue sharing which, in fact, turned into a discussion of foreign policy including his optimistic prognostication on relations with the Soviet Union. I had talked briefly with the president after the speech and told him about my forthcoming visit. His comment was, "A loan exchange might be more important than any one of us thinks now." He urged me to brief the head of the Council for the Arts, Nancy Hanks, on my return. With my Soviet colleagues I, of course, harped continually on my conversation with Nixon. That struck home. Over the days I evoked Nixon's name whenever the negotiations slowed down.

They seldom did. In fact we had to endure only two three-hour-long meetings to arrive at a concordat—in principle. My dream was an exchange of some of our best European old masters for the gold and artifacts of the Scythian tribes from the Hermitage. My Russian colleagues wanted the complete Metropolitan—a variety show from every department—in exchange for a selection of some 250 items from all sections of the Hermitage. Ted Rousseau soon figured out why. He had happened to see on a pile of books on a desk in the ministry a catalogue of an exhibition sent by the Russians to Czechoslovakia which contained precisely 250 pieces, the very ones Baturov or Maturin or Butrova was describing.

"Say yes," Rousseau advised. "Take anything, I am positive we can turn it around in the next stage."

In time we did and wrote out a letter of intent spelling out details of transportation—mostly by air—insurance, conservation examinations, guardianship, temperature and humidity readings of each one of our galleries, and descriptions of our catalogues. (We had brought "The Year 1200" and "19th-Century America" and they were impressed.) Karl Katz suggested a grand television film made by one of our networks.

"I agree!" said an ebullient Maturin, who expected to star in the production.

Several years later—on the fourth of July—all Ted's labors came to fruition. I went to Moscow to iron out the final details of the first

exchange of works of art between the United States and the USSR, officially sanctioned by Nixon and Brezhnev, and signalling détente. Henry Kissinger had become excited about our loan negotiations, remarking that if the two nations put culture on the agenda with the rest of the touchy items, when talks failed on the truly difficult issues, both sides could at least say to the world that they could agree on one vital subject.

Ted Rousseau became something of a dynamo after his chastisement and pressured me to go to East Germany to see the treasures of East Berlin and Dresden and begin to warm up the East German cultural officials for the prospect of stunning loans exhibitions. In December 1973 off we went to Munich and East Germany.

We hired a pair of Mercedes town cars with chauffeurs for the trip to Dresden. Despite the magnificent collections of the paintings galleries, the treasures of the Green Vaults and the restored architecture of the rococo Zwinger, I hated the city. It had the smell of death still hanging over it.

On the long drive from Dresden to West Berlin, I folded myself tightly into the front seat and dictated moody reminiscences of the trip and gloomy observations about my future. I mumbled on about the burdens of being director and about my "loss of creativity." My final words were about having "done the job at the Met and it's time to move on maybe to politics—and I await the call—or in something I have no idea what, which would be marvelous, the mystery and fear of the unknown."

The chance came from a most unexpected area—Philadelphia—where I was asked to become the chief executive officer of the 1976 World's Fair. I was assured I could form the themes, hire the architects, and run the extravaganza. I was flattered and intrigued and had many a chat with Robert Moses to learn his financial arrangement with the New York fair. The job offer floundered, partly because the Nixon administration was cool to the idea of a centralized bicentennial celebration where the "hippies" and anti-Vietnam War protesters could congregate. I also began to think that the Philadelphia fair would never become a truly grand event. I turned the job down but, like a good businessman, made sure that the Met, in order to keep me, was forced to negotiate my first contract. It was to be for three years, seventy-five thousand dollars a year, a raise of twenty-five thousand, plus a guaranteed rise to one hundred thousand plus a generous expense account. I was pleased with the new

arrangement, and for the first time in its history a director was not serving at the pleasure of the board, but like an executive in any American company. Newly armed and protected, I embarked upon what I had felt for several years was the next logical task for the Met to do—weed out the bulging collections, sell unneeded works of art, and use the money to acquire better, far more needed works of art.

It was called deaccessioning, standard museum jargon meaning the removal of a work of art from the general catalogue. Getting rid of excess works by public or private sales or exchanges wasn't a fresh idea. In 1885, five thousand "duplicates" from the heaping, mixed bag of Cypriot antiquities that the Met's first director, Luigi Palma di Cesnola, brought with him were dumped on California's famed Leland Stanford for the spectacular price of ninety-two hundred dollars. Another couple of hundred Cypriot seconds were sold to Princeton University. The moneys earned went for the acquisition of some Egyptian materials, which, in turn, had been deaccessioned from a museum in Egypt. From 1885 to 1970 roughly thirty thousand works of art had been disposed of. The political fallout was minimal, except for one isolated instance, a fire sale in 1929 of fifty years of accumulated junk.

The president at the time was the patrician Robert W. deForest, who was denounced by the New York press for getting rid of one hundred and fifty-nine paintings and six hundred and seventy-five objects. DeForest tried to explain that the Met had been lending for years to other museums and educational institutions but that the volume of stuff had piled up "too much to deal with in such a friendly manner." When it was suggested the museum might give the objects away, deForest testily pointed out that the museum was legally forbidden to do so. Besides, he said, "we need the money to buy things we don't have."

Editorials picked away at deForest about the "sorry" manner in which the Met had dealt with its surpluses. When someone suggested that all surplus material be burned, deForest retorted, "Instead of burning them, why not store them in a non-fireproof building, insure them at full value and leave the rest to Providence?"

I was amused by deForest's ripostes and laughingly told Hawkins and Rousseau that I'd model our forthcoming responses to the press "after crusty old Bob deForest."

"There won't be much flak this time," Hawkins told me. "These are modern times. Everybody disposes. How would MOMA collect if it didn't exchange?"

Nonetheless, I expected a few brickbats, especially from the *Times*, which seemed to have it in for me. My goal was far more ambitious than deForest's. I wanted to raise a twenty-million-dollar war chest. Over the years we had been dipping into the Fletcher and Rogers funds to pay for restorations, frames, publications, and sometimes even expenses for the curators to travel to and from Europe to look at possible purchases. Strictly speaking, the funds were intended to be used *only* for acquisitions, not the extras. Rousseau counselled me it wouldn't be difficult to winnow out twenty million dollars of excess works of art. After all, the Met had three million pieces.

In a couple of weeks Ted was back with the guidelines. The curators were to call the shots. There would be a rigid system of checks and double checks to define which works really contributed to the collections and which were superfluous. I urged the curators to look on the proposed sales as a once-only opportunity. In rare cases valuable works could be considered for disposal *if* clearly superior works—even just one work—by the artist, school, or workshop already existed in the collection or was soon to be added.

Rousseau had singled out one mother lode of paintings that could easily be exchanged or sold—the 1967 bequest of Adelaide Milton de Groot. The quality of the pictures ranged from a small number of world-class masterworks to sundry mediocrities by big names. When I saw the actual wording of the de Groot will, I had to admire the solution arrived at by her lawyers who had clearly been between a rock and a hard place trying to please her and the Met at the same time. She "requested" that the museum not sell anything but give the unwanted works to local museums. The determining factor was a phrase in her will, "without limiting in any way the absolute nature of this bequest," which meant legally that despite her request, we could do anything we liked with her pictures. Nothing would force us to give them away. Our outside counsel, Lord, Day & Lord, confirmed Hawkins' opinion.

I was delighted and quipped that we'd go ahead just the way Bob deForest had—by not sticking any museum with de Groot castoffs. My chief worry was that few art dealers or bidders at auction would be all that entranced by the de Groot sludge and that the return would be low. I recommended to Rousseau and Dillon that we'd do better if we exchanged her things with dealers who always can use some big-name, albeit lesser inventory.

After lengthy discussions with Rousseau and our lawyers, we

spelled out for ourselves the specific steps in the disposal process, steps that were more strict than those recommended by the American Association of Museums. I insisted upon two appraisals, one by a dealer and another by one of the auction houses. The checks and balances were tough, and there would be one full set for deaccessioning and another for actual disposal. I wanted time for all parties who had a vital role—curators, the administration, and the three committees of the board of trustees—to slow down the process, stop it, have another look, and change any decision.

The procedures were ponderous. The curator showed the piece to me and Ted. We would discuss it. The lawyers would search for legal restrictions. The piece would then be presented at a meeting of all curators for approval. If Rousseau and I concurred, the curator would then present the piece to the Acquisitions Committee. After that the trustees heard Ted's or my recommendation. The committee then voted on whether or not to remove the object from the museum's general catalogue. This was followed by a cooling-off period. If the appraised value was under twenty-five thousand, the Acquisitions Committee vote to get rid of the piece would be final. If more, the piece would have to be taken to the next meeting of either the Executive Committee or the full board, whichever came first.

After all that bureaucratic movement, there was a second cooling-off period. Then further steps were taken to decide how to dispose of the object.

Dillon examined the complicated structure, showed it to our lawyers at Lord, Day & Lord, and told me, "This is iron-bound. I can't imagine anyone not approving this. It will become the professional standard."

Rousseau and I met with each curator to find out what there was to get rid of. We didn't waste much time on those departments where what we could dispose of wouldn't bring much on the market. European Paintings was clearly where the surpluses were—and where the money would come from.

Our first plan of action came from Sir John Pope-Hennessy, the director of the Victoria and Albert Museum. I had stopped in to see him on my way to the Soviet Union, and I brought up the touchy subject of deaccessioning.

"We should do it here, too!" he cried. "The place is so cluttered! I should take the lesser things and call Sotheby's to come right in to our front gallery and conduct a fire sale. There'd be so much squeaking and yelling that I can't even suggest it. But, what a concept! A

fire sale would benefit the art market and would put decent pieces back into the private collecting arena, and the pieces could be retained in private collections or go on to other museums as gifts."

That gave me the idea to have our own fire sale in the medieval sculpture court. I met with Peter Wilson, the manipulative genius who had raised Sotheby's to the pinnacle of the art auction business. I admired his business acumen and sense of showmanship. Wilson had an inexhaustible anthology of tales about the art market and its odd denizens. He was somewhat indiscreet, telling how the feverishly eager industrialist-collector Norton Simon had kept bidding against *himself* in his determination to buy Rembrandt's portrait of his son, "Titus" (which later was exposed as a twentieth-century fake). Wilson had, several times, called out to Simon, "The bid to you, Sir, is *you!*" but Simon had ignored him, leading Wilson to believe that Simon had *wanted* to bid against himself so that his Rembrandt would surpass what the Metropolitan had paid for the *Aristotle*, at \$2.3 million. Simon failed, since the "Titus" fetched only \$2.25 million. Wilson would describe the art auction business as "launching an enchanted hot-air balloon, dear Tom, you know, just inflating a work gently, gently and when it stalls, adding a little bit of heat—finding a bid in the balcony, you know—and urging the balloon to fly, oh, so very high."

When I told him my auction idea in general terms, he looked like he might faint with joy. "Ah, brilliant! Ah!" He went on to embellish the "dream sale." It would take place in the early evening—"black tie, of course!"—the truly historical pieces must, he said, be separated from the "dogs." He was insistent that all decorative arts had to be set aside for their own special sale, too.

What specific paintings did I have in mind? It was the right moment to add a little heat to his balloon. I mentioned the de Groot pictures plus individual pieces Rousseau and I had discussed, Picasso's *Woman in White*, which had come from the Museum of Modern Art in the days both museums had a roll-out purchase arrangement, Renoir's *The Meadow*, Edouard Manet's *Woman with a Parrot* (which I knew had been skinned by an incompetent restorer at the museum in the early sixties), and Cézanne's *La Colline des Pauvres*.

Wilson's eyes bugged. "Tom, what I am going to tell you is preliminary, but, with paintings of this stature, I am confident that—if I were to handle the sale—you may expect fifteen to twenty million dollars. Will you let me handle it?"

"I'd think of no one else," I said.

"When?"

"The spring of 1972, if we get our act in order, or perhaps the fall."

The two most enthusiastic proponents of deaccessioning and disposal were Everett Fahy, acting curator of European Paintings, and Henry Geldzahler. Henry was eager to increase his acquisitions war chest and raced through the de Groot collection like a famished locust. He immediately pounced upon three paintings by the German Expressionist Max Beckmann and soon presented them to the Acquisitions Committee for deaccessioning. Andre Meyer dashed ice water on the request by asking how much the Beckmanns were worth. Geldzahler had evaluated them at less than twenty-five thousand dollars each. How did he know? Meyer wanted to know. Geldzahler assured Meyer and the committee that he had made a careful assessment. Meyer responded he felt uneasy with "a curator's evaluation." Wouldn't it be more prudent to ask for an outside evaluation? he asked. Dillon promised Meyer that "painstaking appraisals" would be made when we were actually about to dispose of anything and all appraisals would be reported back to the committee. The Beckmanns were promptly deaccessioned.

The first step in selling them was to find out the most recent auction prices. They were discouraging. Comparable Beckmanns had fetched a mere sixteen to nineteen thousand. Thus we decided to hold a "silent auction" among four dealers. One dealer bid sixty thousand for the three; another told us he'd take them on consignment; a third laughed at us; and the fourth, the Serge Sabarsky Gallery, known for its Expressionists, offered ninety-five thousand but only after Rousseau applied pressure.

Geldzahler scratched away at the de Groot lode again for no fewer than thirty-two pictures. This time he demanded a greater share of the "profits" for his department. He wanted to buy a handsome painting by the German contemporary, Hans Hartung. Ted and I agreed to let him purchase it if the de Groot sale did well.

The new lot was offered to seven dealers, but the results were dismal. Harold Diamond, who had first bid forty-eight thousand for five paintings, went up to eighty thousand for all thirty-two. Since the pieces were so modest, we decided to let the deal go through. Henry Geldzahler got his Hartung, and a few more dollars went to replenish the Fletcher fund. At the rate we were going, it was obvious that we'd never pay back the funds depleted for the Velázquez

or raise our war chest. Rousseau and I pleaded with both Geldzahler and Everett Fahy to dig deeper into their collections and select—at least for deaccessioning—some truly valuable items. Both curators complied with apparent zeal.

Geldzahler worked with a frenzy because he had found another star work he cherished—by David Smith. The sculptor enjoys an almost Olympian reputation among contemporary artists. His metal pieces, some in steel vividly polished in loops and whorls, were to be found in the most distinguished museums and private collections in America and Europe. The work Geldzahler had fallen in love with, *Becca*, had been created in 1965 in the last year of Smith's life. It was a burnished steel "painting" made up of broad and dynamic strokes and had been in "Henry's Show." Geldzahler had presented it twice to the Acquisitions Committee at one hundred thousand dollars and had been turned down—lack of funds. Afterwards, he had begged the owner of the Marlborough Gallery, Frank Lloyd, to give the work to the museum. Lloyd rebuffed him. Since then, the price had gone up to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—high, but not out of line with other stellar works by Smith.

We suggested that if Henry chose a group of objects to deaccession, we would give him a lion's share of the revenues. Geldzahler went back a third time to the de Groot collection, selected five pictures, and, after the full disposal process, made a trade with Lloyd. He was so pleased that he showed up in my office one morning early to tell me what a "great director" I was.

Fahy had also plunged into the preparation of lists and hunted down exchange deals. One exchange was with dealer Julius Weitzner, a master manipulator, who had a reputation for applying exalted authors to modest works. He had also been suspected of fixing up paintings a bit more than strict conservation rules would have condoned. Yet, Weitzner never set out to cheat anyone. He lived by the motto "Let the Buyer Beware" and would emphasize to a potential client that he was as wary as anybody in the art business. In Weitzner's gallery there were dozens of so-so paintings of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries—plus an abundance of nineteenth-century replicas. Yet occasionally, one could find a gem that Weitzner had overlooked.

Fahy found a spectacular one, a tiny painting in oil on copper by the early seventeenth-century Roman master Carlo Saraceni depicting an arcane religious subject—the Community of the Blessed

Adoring the Holy Trinity. Weitzner knew the picture was a Saraceni. He had bought it at an English country auction for less than fifteen hundred. But what he didn't know was that in the rarified circles of Italian seicento scholarship, Saraceni was considered a seminal creative force, a sort of historical bridge between late-sixteenth-century artists toiling in Rome and the members of the extravagant schools of Caravaggio and the Carracci. Weitzner was asking fifteen thousand dollars.

Fahy assured me that the Saraceni was worth at least three times that. It seemed to be in matchless condition, especially for a painting on bendable copper. Fahy had chosen a picture for exchange, *A Street in Delft* by Jan van der Heyden, which had been given to the museum in 1915 as an unrestricted gift. It happened that Weitzner adored it. On the surface the pleasant, banal street scene looked appealing. In reality, it was a wreck. As Fahy said, "its condition is so deteriorated that it would never be worth trying to restore. . . . The museum already owns three fine pictures by van der Heyden which more than adequately represent the artist. . . ." Sonnenberg backed up Fahy's opinion.

We took the van der Heyden to three paintings dealers for their appraisal and possible interest. One, William Acquavella, dismissed it as worthless. Another offered ten thousand. A third refused to quote any price at all. None of this was imparted to Weitzner. Yet, since he pined for it, he got it. He picked it up, delivered the Saraceni, and proclaimed himself "highly satisfied."

Fahy also supported my demand that a number of Impressionist paintings, exceptional on their own but lesser compared with other works by the same artists in our possession, be removed from the museum's collections. We would tour the Paintings galleries and the storerooms about what could and could not be dispensed with. Rousseau made the point that our choices be compared not only with comparable pictures in our collections but with those we knew were coming as gifts or bequests. Some of the pictures we discussed parting with were lofty in quality. Picasso's *Woman in White* was "reaching the summit," as Rousseau put it, but disposable because we had a far better Picasso, the *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*. We also realized that several more Picassos would be coming to us in bequests. We hoped that the *Woman in White* would fetch an enormous sum—perhaps a million and a half dollars.

Rousseau and I had singled out a number of fine Impressionists

that included Manet's *Woman with a Parrot* and Cézanne's *La Col-line des Pauvres*. We wanted to deaccession two Camille Pissarros, including the handsome *Steamboats in the Port of Rouen*, another Manet, the *George Moore*, the unfinished version of a stunning pastel we intended to keep, several routine Corots, a weak Brittany Gauguin, a so-so Seurat, a Signac, a Daumier, a Vuillard still life, and a second Picasso, *La Coiffure*. Ted, Fahy, and I had also argued over a few others including Courbet's *Robert Le Diable* and Manet's *Torero*, both of which he eventually vetoed.

All of these were to be presented by Everett Fahy to the Acquisitions Committee in late November 1971. Our dream of the gala auction conducted by Peter Wilson in the medieval sculpture court was starting to take shape. As usual, I couldn't keep my mouth shut. In a "backgrounder" to *New York Times* art reporter Grace Glueck, I blurted out my plans for the sales and swore her to secrecy. "This is going to be the art story of the decade!" she exulted. I was pleased. If she were right, the publicity would make prices soar.

In the sixties and seventies the tax laws for the donations of works of art were far more liberal than they are today. Back then it was possible for a collector to give a work to the Metropolitan—or a college or university museum, or even a local hospital—bought for, say, five thousand dollars, claim the value had grown to half a million fifteen years later, and obtain a full deduction on the half million without paying gains tax on the difference between the purchase price and the most recent value. Works of art could also be given over years with the owner retaining the piece until the last slice had been taken as a deduction. This benevolent system supplanted an even more generous arrangement, which came to an end in the early sixties, whereby you could give a painting or a collection of works to an institution, receive the full tax deduction, and keep the pieces until you died.

Works could also be shared between several owners, and each owner could get a tax deduction when his or her share was donated. It was even possible to own a work with the dealer, get a partial deduction, and then let the dealer come to tax terms with his share—which had increased in value, naturally—in whatever way the dealer wanted. Such was the case with a stunning painting by the French eighteenth-century master Jean-Baptiste Greuze. The Met owned seventy percent and Wildenstein owned thirty percent. The Met's share of the picture had been given in the will of the late art-

MAKING THE MUMMIES DANCE

book publisher Harry Abrams. But since Abrams apparently had not fully purchased the painting the "remainder" still belonged to Wildenstein. How to make a deal?

The Met owned a significant number of paintings and drawings by the French nineteenth-century classicist, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. The one in the Lehman Collection was one of the best in existence, the tour-de-force portrait of La Comtesse de Broglie. We also had other Ingres masterworks such as the twin portraits of M. and Mme. Jacques Louis Leblanc and the portrait of Joseph Antoine Moltedo, and an uninspired portrait of the Maréchal Count Gérard, which, to me, summed up the pomposity of Bonaparte's court. The painting had been acquired in an exchange with Wildenstein & Company for a number of lesser paintings. Rousseau had swung the deal and had never regretted it. It was Rousseau who suggested "turning the tables on Wildenstein" and trading another of our Ingreses, a gray version of Ingres's famous over-life-sized *Odalisque*, for the remaining third of the Greuze. The gray lady, or *grisaille*, the French word used by art historians for studies or paintings in grays only, had always been something of a problem. The museum's scholarly paintings catalogue had called the picture in all probability a study by Ingres himself for his magnificent *Odalisque* in the Louvre, a portrait of Bonaparte's sister.

Ted Rousseau thought otherwise. To him the painting could only be a study made by one of many Ingres students after the *Odalisque*. Ingres was, as Rousseau insisted, "perhaps cool and correct—maybe punctilious—but never gray—especially when he painted the sister of Napoleon."

Everett Fahy agreed with Ted wholeheartedly and urged me to convince Wildenstein to take the "Ingres" on trade. Ted handled the negotiations and had to use all his diplomatic skills, for Daniel Wildenstein felt our painting had to be by Ingres himself—with some admittedly slightly sloppy passages. But I had demanded that in any future sale, our belief that the painting was a school piece had to be clearly stated.

We sent the picture to France so Daniel could have a good look and think about my demand, and the picture was deaccessioned late in 1970. In France it lay in limbo. In the rush of the Centennial, the Velázquez, the fracas over the building program, budgetary turmoil, and staff agitations, the painting was totally forgotten. It would soon reappear at the most awkward moment and cause intense embarrassment to both us and Wildenstein.

THE BIG "KERFUFFLE"

Our systems of deaccessioning proceeded on schedule. At last, I was going to see a profound policy change, a striking modernization, something equal in scale to the master plan and the changes in the board of trustees and the staff. Some curators became so eager to deaccession that Ted and I had to cool them off. Dietrich von Bothmer suggested that we sell all the approximately thirteen thousand ancient coins, spread over six departments. I argued that we had to set up especially tough procedures to be sure we weren't wiping out a precious asset. Over six months the departments in question placed their numismatic holdings into three categories: pieces that were interesting for purely historical and educational purposes, those wanted by the American Numismatic Society, which was where most of the Met's coins had been on loan since 1909, and those coins that could be sold. The departments kept around two thousand. The Numismatic Society wanted about fifteen hundred (although the officials stated several times that they'd "like the whole lot") and about ninety-nine hundred were deaccessioned.

The next step was to find out which coin auction house would give us the best deal. We had first talked about letting coin dealers make silent bids but then concluded that, since our collections were so wide-ranging in time and in geography and because we had so many, haggling with individual dealers would prove too complicated. Instead we invited the world's leading ancient coin auction house, Münzen und Medaillen of Basel, to make an offer on the collection. We were assured a yield of as much as a million dollars. The offer would have been accepted had I not stumbled upon some insider information and, overnight, made a new deal, more than doubling our take, a deal that would also make me suffer.

Along with deaccessioning, part of the new businesslike posture of the museum, according to Dillon, was going to be a "professional fund-raising operation" like those run by colleges and universities. He demanded we hire an outside team and assign "our best" people inside to lay the groundwork for a campaign that would net a sum of about sixty-five million dollars. Compared to what Harvard might seek, this, of course, was peanuts, but it would be the first fund-drive in the history of the Met.

The firm of Kersting/Brown was brought in to work under George Trescher's former aide, an exceptionally able young woman by the name of Inge Heckel. At once our consultants told us that the worst move we could make would be to hold a flashy art auction that might earn fifteen to twenty million dollars. As wry Wiley Critz, our rep-

representative from Kersting/Brown, said to me, "If you hold *that* auction, then forget about the foundations, the corporations, the members, or *anyone* giving you a cent for years after."

To Critz, art sales and trades and exchanges were something that should remain out of sight at the Met. He was in favor of our deaccessioning but only if we conducted our business secretly. He wanted to mount his fund-raising campaign in the full light of our general financial need—the city's economic plight, our deficit, our having to shut down a day a week, the staff layoffs, the need for building funds, our desire to have superior education programs.

I was impressed by Critz's arguments. I discussed the issues with Dillon, and we both came to the conclusion that our dream of a great public sale was *out*. The consequences of our decision turned out to be disastrous.

Still Rousseau, Douglas Dillon, and I were determined to salvage something for our war chest. Our goal was no longer to earn anything like twenty million. Our expectations had fallen to a modest five to ten million from individual sales or trades.

At the same time, Fahy was suddenly having "fainting spells," as Rousseau put it, when it came to making up his mind or sticking to a decision. Curators can be fragile souls prone to changing their minds, and Fahy, who had effortlessly sent several valuable paintings through our complex deaccessioning machinery, began to backtrack. He would propose a group of Impressionists one month and call for their withdrawal the next. I haunted his office, continually persuading him to stand pat.

Despite Fahy's waffling, Ted and I insisted that he agree to sell two "big money" pictures to repay the debt on the Velázquez. These were van Gogh's *Olive Pickers*, purchased through funds donated by Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Bernhard, and yet another de Groot painting, *Tropics* by the Douanier Rousseau.

The *Tropics* was to be presented to the Acquisitions Committee on November 3. When it came time, Fahy did a volte-face. He argued that since the museum had but one other Rousseau, he was concerned about its departure, even though he knew another, finer Rousseau had been pledged as a gift. The committee prudently cancelled the sale of the *Tropics* and postponed a decision on a number of other de Groot paintings.

Patiently and gently, Ted brought Fahy back around. The man was a most charming individual, much given to smiles. What I didn't

appreciate at the time was that Fahy would smile and say anything to duck an awkward confrontation. At any rate, a month after the November meeting, Rousseau and I reconvinced Fahy to part with both the van Gogh and the Rousseau. He stated in writing that the *Tropics* is "surely inferior to the other large Rousseau in the museum, the 'Repast of the Lion,' and could be sold without weakening the strength of the museum's collection of nineteenth century paintings. . . ." Based upon that, in January the Acquisitions Committee recommended to the full board the deaccessioning of both paintings, and the full board approved.

On Ted's advice we decided not to sell the pictures at auction. Six months before, a Rousseau of far finer quality and comparable size had fetched the then world-record price of seven hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. With the standard expenses and the minimum commission, the price for ours would have been less than seven hundred thousand. Parke-Bernet gave us a hard estimate on the *Olive Pickers* of between seven hundred and nine hundred thousand. The amounts were tempting, we thought, but not enough.

Ted found an avid suitor for the two paintings: Frank Lloyd of Marlborough Gallery. Ted and Lloyd settled on a price for the van Gogh and the Rousseau of \$1.45 million and a contract was prepared.

Whereupon Everett Fahy changed his mind again. On February 8, 1972, he deposited on my desk a memo formally objecting to the deaccessioning of Rousseau's *Tropics*, Picasso's *Woman in White*, his *La Coiffure*, a Gauguin, a Pissarro, and several other pictures.

Even after I wrote Dillon a sizzling letter about Fahy's indecisiveness, he decided to back away from selling any important Impressionists or Post-Impressionists. So I dutifully reacquired everything on the sacrifice list, except one, the *Tropics* by Rousseau. I reminded Fahy that *he* had urged its sale, then had objected, then had approved, and once again had said no. I vigorously defended its disposal to Dillon and the board committees. The trustees listened to all sides and went along with me.

Two weeks later, on Sunday, February 27, 1972, John Canaday of the *New York Times* hit us with a hard punch to the jaw.

The art critic's column was entitled "Very Quiet and Very Dangerous" and had obviously been initiated by his colleague Grace Glueck. She had conducted an inquiry, talking to dealers, Sotheby's, and some of our own employees, finding out whom we had approached and which paintings had been deaccessioned or were about

to be. She had phoned me with a host of specific questions and, though I told her the board had not made up its mind, she kept hammering me with questions about specific paintings. She brought up certain pictures that Ted and I had discussed only with Fahy and he with a very close circle of staff. Her information was out of date. I told her it was inaccurate.

When John Canaday produced his Sunday piece, based on her investigation, I was livid. Canaday had claimed that, according to usually reliable sources, the Metropolitan would offer for sale the very paintings I had repeatedly told Grace Glueck were no longer under consideration.

Canaday came out against any sale of anything by any American art museum. Museums, he explained, were neither merchandise marts nor aesthetic stock exchanges; they were repositories of precious records. "Nothing worth buying or accepting as a gift in the first place ever becomes less than part of the record of a phase of our culture, even if it also represents a curatorial idiocy. In spite of every exception, the rule is that selling from the collections is hazardous policy."

I phoned Canaday—I had been enjoying a kind of détente with him—and tried to reason with him. I assured him that the pictures he listed were *not* going to be deaccessioned. I said we would be selling in the future, as we always had, in a variety of ways. I said that our reasons for disposing of things had been published a number of times. I reminded him that he had supported the Guggenheim Museum when it had sold ninety-seven Kandinskys. He said he was "older and much wiser."

I should have left it at that. But, of course, it just wasn't in my arrogant and combative nature. I felt I had Canaday on the ropes, so why not strike back in an article? I could point to his exaggerations, while at the same time spelling out the museum's philosophy in print. I got approval from Doug Dillon. I had barely two days to write my article to make the next Sunday *Times Arts and Leisure* section.

Some wiser person should have told me to hold my tongue.

My piece was called "Very Inaccurate and Very Dangerous" and was neither deft, nor polite, nor intelligent. I made a frontal assault, charging that Canaday's information had been "ninety-nine per cent inaccurate."

"What are the facts?" I wrote. "The pictures mentioned by Mr. Canaday did come under preliminary discussion, but were placed

out of consideration either by the Board, the Curator of Paintings [by this time we had promoted Everett Fahy to help keep him in line], the Curator-in-Chief, myself or other colleagues. These included every single one of the pictures mentioned by Canaday except for the Gauguin, about which, incidentally, no final decision has been made." The *Tropics* and the *Olive Pickers* had not been mentioned.

I explained how many times in its past history the museum had disposed of works and why, describing too our "stringent process of review." I described what we did with the money—only using it for other, more needed pieces. I related how the Met collected in the belief "that the business of a great art museum is quality, not numbers." I cited illustrious exchanges of the past, the Ingres *Maréchal Count Gérard* and the Carlo Saraceni.

There were risks in disposing of things, but nothing was more irrevocable than missing a great work of art—the prime hazard of the profession—something far more likely to occur than an error in disposal.

I ended my piece in something of a rage, hoping to humiliate Canaday, but instead only fanned his flame.

Next Sunday, Canaday struck back with another column. Like my blast to him, Canaday's counterattack would have been better off stuck in a drawer for a while—or never published. He tried to claim "victory" in that he alone had stopped us from selling the works he had mentioned. We decided to clam up and go on with our plans. The next day Ted met with Frank Lloyd of Marlborough and signed the contract to sell him the *Tropics* and the *Olive Pickers*.

Four months later, when I figured the deaccessioning controversy had faded, it exploded. I got a phone call from Canaday who casually asked me if we had anything "major" up for sale. At the time we didn't and I said so. But I had forgotten about the *Tropics* and the *Olive Pickers* and the group of paintings we had disposed of in several silent auctions.

Two days later I got another call.

"Is it not true, Mr. Hoving," Canaday said, "that at least two of the Metropolitan's masterpieces are at this moment for sale on the London art market? I refer specifically to Henri Rousseau's *Tropics* and Vincent van Gogh's *Olive Pickers*."

For an instant I could hardly think. I felt like I was about to be arrested for some crime. I tried to sound casual, as if I had been

thrown a routine question. "Wherever did you get that idea?" I said. As far as I knew the pictures were not on the London market but in the Torino home of Fiat chairman Gianni Agnelli, whom Ted Rousseau had approached about buying the paintings. So I told Canaday firmly that the pictures were "not now in London for sale." Was I positive? Yes! He slammed down the phone. I yelled for Rousseau and Hawkins to come into the office at once. I knew I didn't have much time before he called back again. His editor would no doubt urge him to ask the obvious question any seasoned reporter would have asked from the start: were these pictures or any other from the Met up for sale anywhere in the world to anybody or at any gallery or auction house?

The call came less than ten minutes later. My heart was still pounding furiously. But Rousseau was by my side, so I answered the critic calmly, trying with my tone of voice to indicate that the matter of the *Tropics* and the *Olive Pickers* was everyday stuff.

"John, you know our position," I tried to explain. "We have stated over and over that we are going to sell. No, I did not lie the other day. At present there are no plans to sell or exchange anything other than dribs and drabs. Yes, right now, some paintings are being offered for sale. They happen to have been deaccessioned months ago. No, none of them are any of the ones you published back then—erroneously, I have to say. To my knowledge no London gallery is right now displaying the *Tropics* or the *Olive Pickers*. Is a private collector interested? Yes, one private collector has been examining them for months. Who? I'm not at liberty to say. Am I being clandestine? No. You must understand this is the way works of art are sold—most private collectors don't like having their names bandied about. No, I don't think these two paintings are 'masterpieces' when you take into account what else the museum owns. How else would I describe a 'rare' van Gogh? Or a 'choice' Rousseau? Those are *your* words. I'd call them good pictures, but not good enough for the Met with so much in Post-Impressionism. How many van Goghs do we have? Ted says 'around a dozen.' How many Rousseaus . . . ?"

I was trapped. Canaday angrily asked the question again. We only had one more!

"John, we have one other and it's . . .," I said but he wouldn't let me finish.

He screamed—was it prudent to sell "half the Metropolitan's total inventory of the works of one of modern history's greatest masters?"

"In this case, yes," I said lamely.

Canaday's article was front-page. It had a huge illustration of the *Tropics*. It was entitled "Metropolitan Museum Sells Two Modern Masterpieces in an Unusual Move." It was a broadside rather than reportage. And it caused a series of explosions. I was hit with more artillery than during "Harlem on My Mind." The press, professional organizations, the city government, and finally the attorney general of the state of New York bombarded me. The *Times*, in a stunningly good piece of investigative reporting, rooted out the half-forgotten Ingres *Odalisque* in Paris and cast our on-and-off deal with Wildenstein as a classic case of clandestine art shenanigans. The painting was rushed back to the museum—to dead storage. Dillon lost his resolve momentarily and appointed a special committee of the board to examine the deaccessioning practices.

The Art Dealers Association accused me of a "breach of public trust" despite the fact that a number of members had delightedly participated in the trades and sales. *Time* and *Newsweek* roasted me as did *New York* magazine. Words like *sinister*, *warped*, *a war criminal of art* burst forth. I told Dillon I was physically, mentally, and spiritually worn down and could not sustain another "kerfuffle," as *Newsweek* termed the fracas. Trustee Dick Dilworth had hinted to me coldly that my chances of survival were once again "not good."

I tried to explain to my wavering board that all the deaccessioning was part of the ongoing streamlining of the institution, part of putting it on a truly businesslike basis. I admitted my errors—having fought back in the press too viciously, being insensitive to the charge that in getting rid of works of art, I had in some way broken secret treaties, damaged traditions, and forced the museum to become something it could never become—a business. But even my admissions of failure generated more criticisms. The truth was that deaccessioning was responsible, even innocuous, and had been blown out of proportion by my increasing number of enemies. More and more I was finding that my policies and moves, intended to make the Met more efficient and modern, were being contested in the press. Increasingly, I was discovering that if I fought the criticism I was perceived as a whiner and if I kept quiet I got slammed. I was a loser either way.

When Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz announced that he would open a full investigation with complete subpoena powers, I was relieved. I knew Lefkowitz as a publicity hound but was convinced at the same time that he respected due process and would not

take rumor as fact or misstatement as gospel. The inquiry lasted seven months. Dozens of art dealers, trustees, and curators were interviewed under oath. Thousands of documents were studied. In the end Lefkowitz announced he had found no cause for either litigation or legislation. No wrongdoing. No cheating or bilking of Adelaide Milton de Groot or anybody else. No harmful collusion with art dealers. No instances when we had sold cheap with the result that someone else had received a windfall. No evidence of mismanagement or hanky-panky. The only criticism—and it was harsh—was that I had handled the public relations atrociously. I had. I had acted deplorably in trying to weasel out of telling Canaday, and others, the full facts about the deaccessioning and auction plans until it was too late, with the result that the impression that I had been lying had become indelible.

Buoyed by being cleared of wrongdoing, I was nonetheless weakened by Lefkowitz's attack on my conduct. I was furious with the attorney general for pressuring Dillon and Gilpatric to surrender to his demands that henceforth all works to be disposed had to be at public auction. "Let Lefkowitz take us to court or pass a law in Albany," I urged. "He's forcing us into a restraint of trade." Lefkowitz would have and should have been defeated. But the board was shutting its ears to my voice.

One of my most appalling lapses of good behavior—and common sense—with the press during the "kerfuffle" had been a stormy interview with the art critic of *Newsweek*, a gentle artist by the name of Douglas Davis. I had threatened to punch him in the face after he breezily remarked that I wasn't capable of deaccessioning since I wasn't much of a collector. I had shouted at him, "I began as a collector and my instincts are still there. When I see something I want, I do everything I can to get it. I've gotten three hundred million dollars worth of stuff since I've been here and I've never made a mistake. What other museum, what other city in the world, has gotten these things? I'm proud that I've gotten the greatest objects in the world, in my time here. . . . I'm a breed that won't happen again, not out of genius, but because of treaties and other obligations. In the last waning hours of collecting, I will go through 'kerfuffle' to get the great objects."

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THE "HOT POT"

I have fallen in love more often with works of art than with women, which is, I suppose, more a professional quirk than a psychological flaw. I have admired thousands of works, loved a hundred or so. Only one was an object of total adoration—a Greek vase dating to around 510 B.C.

The vase, officially called a calyx krater, was designed by Euxitheos, the potter, and decorated by Euphronios, the painter. Though it is only eighteen inches tall and twenty-one in diameter, it is heavy: one has difficulty lifting it. It was made for mixing as much as seven gallons of wine and water. To call it an artifact is like referring to the Sistine Ceiling as a painting. The Euphronios krater is everything I revere in a work of art. It is flawless in technique, is a grand work of architecture, has several levels of heroic subject matter, and keeps on revealing something new at every glance. To love it, you only have to look once. To adore it, you must read Homer and know that the drawing is perhaps the summit of fine art. Truly, the calyx krater