

ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTATIONS ON TUESDAY, 17 MARCH

Members' meeting on collection mobility at the Bonnefantenmuseum

Collection mobility as perceived by a large American civic art museum

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The Detroit Institute of Arts, one of the larger civic art museums in the United States, is in a somewhat unique position because of a number of extenuating factors. First, it is by far the largest art museum in the state of Michigan (ca. 60,000 square miles). Second, the DIA receives state funding.

In terms of collection mobility there are three primary areas of consideration: loans to special exhibitions; extended loans to smaller arts institutions; and the ongoing process of deaccessioning. A possible fourth consideration in the making is namely, leasing parts of the collection for sustained periods of time to destinations outside the state and most likely outside the country.

The DIA is a generous lender to special exhibitions around the world. Our criteria for participating in such loan exhibitions are primarily governed by our assessment of the merits of the proposed exhibition. Any exhibition involving serious intellectual investigation commands our respect and support. Such projects provide invaluable insight into artworks in our own collection and we benefit directly. Once a loan is agreed to, the DIA has its own strict requirements structured within the loan agreement with the borrowing institution.

Extended loans to smaller art institutions

For many years the DIA has lent works to smaller institutions, primarily within the state of Michigan. This process was accelerated from about the year 2000 until 2007 during which time the museum was involved in a total building renovation which involved a substantial and partial closure, resulting in putting much of the permanent collection in storage. This provided us with a unique opportunity, but even before this time we had lent works for extended periods of time. For example, we lent our *View of Den Brielle* by Daniel Vosmaer to the Gemeente Museum in Den Brielle where it has been on view for more than 15 years. We also lent seven Old-Master paintings to the University of Michigan Museum of Art where they were integrated into the university's teaching collection. When Detroit's sister city in Japan, Toyota City, opened its art museum, the inaugural exhibition was drawn entirely from the European paintings collection of the DIA.

During our period of partial closure, the DIA lent a broad selection of American paintings to the Kalamazoo Art Center for several years. This enabled the KAC to present an overview of American art (from Copley to Inness) to its audience. At the same time the DIA also organized an

international touring exhibition of its finest American paintings (*American Beauty*), which traveled to Ireland and France as well as to four sites within the United States.

Because of state funding the DIA maintained a statewide exhibitions program which, by the time I arrived in Detroit in 1994 had become somewhat moribund. Yet, we did continue to organize exhibitions drawn from our permanent collection. For example, a junior colleague in the European Paintings Department organized a dossier exhibition drawn from our collection of 18th-century British portraits (titled *Collars and Cuffs*), which we then circulated to several museums statewide.

In response to our partial closure I became involved in a unique opportunity initiated by the director of the Kresge Art Museum in East Lansing. Instead of the DIA generating a packaged show, the director of the Kresge worked with three other museums throughout Michigan. Together, they selected roughly 40 European paintings of the 17th and 18th centuries representing categories such as landscape, still life, portraiture and scenes from everyday life that they felt would appeal to their respective publics. This proved to be a great success.

Deaccessioning

Many American museums have the freedom to sell artworks from the collection, albeit with strict guidelines as to how the moneys generated may be spent. I have been directly involved in the process first in Minneapolis and then in Detroit. For example, when I arrived in Detroit the collection of European paintings before 1900 numbered about 1,000 works. By 2009 the collection is closer to 900. Through the recent acquisition of characteristic paintings by Aert van der Neer and David Teniers the Younger the museum was able to dispose of several works ascribed to the same masters that were either horribly damaged originals or works with overly optimistic attributions which served little or no purpose within the collection.

Most recently the DIA has embarked on a systematic reassessment of its early Italian paintings collection. While many exciting discoveries have been made, we are also discovering that several of the works, hitherto thought to be period examples, have turned out to be modern forgeries. Our policy dictates that such works should never be sold and reintroduced into the art market. They remain part of our study collection as a sobering reminder.

Postscript

As the DIA now faces serious financial constraints because of the faltering world economy (in which Michigan is particularly hard hit) new options are under discussion. One of these is the possibility of leasing parts of the collection for sustained periods of time to museums elsewhere in the world which do not have collections in areas where the DIA has particular strengths - e.g. American art, European art, and native American art.