



The Founders and Their Philosophy

IN THE 1890s, America was ripe for an annual international exhibition of contemporary art. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the country had ceased to be an aesthetic backwater: wealthy Americans, often of informed and progressive tastes, had become a major source of patronage for European art, and American artists, trained in the best schools of Europe, had begun to enjoy considerable success abroad. The reputations of such native sons as James McNeill Whistler, John Singer Sargent, and John White Alexander fully equaled those of European luminaries such as Adolphe Bouguereau, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and Giovanni Boldini. An interest in art was burgeoning among the country's middle classes. There were few large or middle-sized cities that could not boast of a gallery, an art association, or a school of art. Popular magazines such as *Harper's* and *Scribner's* regularly informed their readers of the latest artistic developments at home and abroad. Exhibitions — especially such major international exhibitions as those at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the St. Louis Exposition from 1895 to 1897 — were well attended. A yearly exhibition that would assemble the best or most representative work of both continents, allowing comparisons to be drawn between them, was virtually assured of an enthusiastic reception from artists, critics, and public alike.

But who would have expected it to be established in Pittsburgh? The logical home for such an important exhibition would have seemed to be

New York, the art center of the nation, or Boston, or Philadelphia, or perhaps even Chicago, in an effort to build upon the successful exhibition of 1893. Pittsburgh had no reputation as an art center. Like most large cities, it had its artists and its exhibitions, but none that excited more than local interest. In the eyes of the world, Pittsburgh was exclusively an industrial center, from which little in the way of artistic endeavor could be expected. That it became the home of a major international exhibition was due to that most remarkable of nineteenth-century industrialists, Andrew Carnegie (figure 1).

A native of Dunfermline, Scotland, Carnegie emigrated to Pittsburgh in 1848, when he was thirteen years old. His first job, working as a bobbin boy, earned him \$1.20 a week; but by 1867, when he left Pittsburgh for New York, he had amassed the sizable income of \$50,000 a year, largely through shrewd investments in railway sleeping-car stock. A few years later he entered the steel industry and became a multimillionaire. Although Carnegie was the equal of any late nineteenth-century capitalist in cunning and ruthlessness, his mind was of a far more philosophic temper than was usually encountered among that breed, and he was far less interested in the acquisition of wealth as an end in itself. In a private memorandum of 1868 he wrote: "No idol more debasing than money. . . . To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery." He resolved to retire from business in 1870, secure an Oxford education, then settle in London, where he would involve himself "in public matters, especially those connected with education and improvement of the poorer classes."¹

Although he failed to adhere to the letter of this resolution (he did not retire until 1901 and received only an honorary degree from Oxford), he succeeded in living up to its spirit. As his millions multiplied, he devoted more of his time to philanthropic and intellectual pursuits. Although he belonged to New York's business-oriented Union League Club, Carnegie preferred to hobnob with the intelligentsia at the Nineteenth Century Club, and he counted among his friends some of the leading American and British thinkers of the age, including Henry Ward Beecher, Matthew Arnold, and Herbert Spencer.

Philosophical considerations, including an idiosyncratic and inaccurate interpretation of the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, deeply influenced Carnegie's theory and practice of philanthropy. In his youth,

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he recalled in his memoirs, Spencer's writings had affected him with all the force of a divine revelation:

I remember that light came in as a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of theology and the supernatural, but I had found the truth of evolution. "All is well since all grows better" became my motto, my true source of comfort. Man was not created with an instinct for his own degradation, but from the lower he had risen to the higher forms. Nor is there any conceivable end to his march to perfection. His face is turned to the light; he stands in the sun and looks upward.²

Yet, despite his professed faith in Spencer's doctrine, Carnegie owed little to it beyond an optimistic belief in human progress. Many of his ideas were utterly contrary to those of the English philosopher. Social Darwinists opposed philanthropy on the grounds that it interfered with the natural process of evolution, which dictated the survival of the fittest and the extinction of the unfit. The wealthy, whose economic success proved their fitness, were warned against protecting the obviously unfit poor from the consequences of their inferiority, for to do so would be to thwart nature's design and impede the betterment of the species.

Carnegie, who accepted the economic criterion of fitness but recalled his own spectacular rise from poverty to affluence, took an altogether different view of the evolutionary role of wealth. The natural leader of society was not the pampered rich boy but the poor boy possessed of genius and a strong incentive to get ahead in this world:

Such boys always have marched, and always will march, straight to the front and lead the world: they are the epoch-makers. Let one select the three or four foremost names, the supremely great in every field of human triumph, and note how small is the contribution of hereditary rank and wealth to the short list of immortals who have lifted and advanced the race. It will, I think, be seen that the possession of these is almost fatal to greatness and goodness, and that the greatest and best of our race have necessarily been nurtured in the bracing school of poverty — the only school capable of producing the supremely great, the genius.³

It was the duty of the rich, Carnegie argued, to assist and encourage the natural geniuses among the ranks of the poor. The way to achieve this was

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not through indiscriminate almsgiving or through raising the wages of workers (in this, he agreed with the Social Darwinists, and his employees fared no better than those of less enlightened industrialists) but through educational opportunities. In a speech delivered in 1895 at the dedication ceremony of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute, he declared that money spent on education

is put to better and nobler ends than if it had been distributed from week to week in dribbles among the masses of the people. Concentrated in one great educative institution, lasting for all time, its usefulness is forever, and it ministers to the divine in man, his reason and his conscience, and thus lifts him higher and higher in the scale of being; he becomes less and less of the brute, and more of the man. I am not content to pass down in the history of Pittsburgh as one who only helped the masses to obtain greater enjoyment of those appetites which we share equally with the brutes — more to eat, more to drink, and richer raiment. . . . My aspiration takes a higher flight. Mine be it to have contributed to the enlightenment and joys of the mind, to the things of the spirit, to all that tends to bring into the lives of the toilers of Pittsburgh sweetness and light. I hold this the noblest possible use of wealth.⁴

It is clear from this statement that Carnegie's ameliorist ambitions often went beyond the potential geniuses to embrace the masses as a whole.

The "great educative institution" that Carnegie founded in Pittsburgh was an elaboration of his favorite form of philanthropy, the free public library. He first offered to build a library for Pittsburgh in 1881, subject to his usual condition that, whereas he would provide the funds for the actual structure, the community must pay to supply, staff, and maintain it. Because Pennsylvania law did not permit municipal property taxes to be used for such a purpose, the city had to decline the offer. In 1887 the state legislature passed an enabling act that removed the restriction, and in February 1890, Pittsburgh asked Carnegie to renew his offer, which he gladly did.⁵

By this time, his ideas had expanded. In "The Best Fields for Philanthropy," published in the December 1889 *North American Review*, he had suggested that, whenever possible, the free library should include a museum and an art gallery. Some, he admitted, might consider the latter benefaction "fanciful," but, he declared:

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It is better to reach and touch the sentiment for beauty in the naturally bright minds of this class [that is, the working class] than to pander to those incapable of being so touched. For what the improver of the race must endeavor is to reach those who have the divine spark ever so feebly developed, that it may be strengthened and grow.

The library, however, was to be the core of the institution, whereas the art gallery and museum were to be regarded “as wise extravagances, for which public revenues should not be given. . . . These are such gifts as a citizen may fitly bestow upon a community and endow, so that it will cost the City nothing.”⁶

Despite the role that art played in Carnegie’s philanthropy, he never became a noted connoisseur or collector as did his business partner Henry Clay Frick. His longtime friend the Pittsburgh artist Martin Leisser declared flatly that Carnegie “didn’t really know much about art.” Carnegie’s own claims to artistic knowledge varied from the bold to the modest. In his autobiography, he declared that his European tour of 1865–1866 had taught him to “classify the works of the great painters” and had made him a highly competent judge of art. Elsewhere, he credited himself with “just a little artistic sense, . . . I can’t be fooled all the time, that is, I do know a little.”⁷

This latter remark would appear to be closer to the truth. His occasional statements on art, taken all together, show that he was aware of the more important established artists of his time; that he had a basic, though superficial, knowledge of the history of art; and that he knew what he liked. His opinions were often forcefully expressed but breathtakingly ill-informed. Asked to approve a list of names to be carved on the Carnegie Institute’s entablature, he complained that Perugino had been omitted and Rubens included: “The latter only a painter of fat vulgar women, while a study of the pictures of Raphael will show anyone that he was really only a copyist of Perugini [*sic*], whose pupil he was.”⁸ Carnegie does not, in fact, seem to have taken a deep interest in art, except insofar as it could serve to improve the condition of humanity. According to the wisdom of the age, art was ennobling, uplifting, at once an agent and an index of social progress. Carnegie accepted this view; he regarded art as a powerful instrument for his purposes, and he meant to make use of it.

The idea of the social utility of art became widely current among American intellectuals during the second quarter of the nineteenth cen-

ture.⁹ Travelers abroad contrasted the behavior of the European and American masses, observing that the former were orderly and restrained, the latter often dangerous and unruly. This, they reasoned, was due to Europe's artistic traditions, expressed in common household goods as well as in great works of public architecture and in the art displayed in public museums, which produced a cultural ambiance whose refining influence penetrated to the lowest levels of society. America lacked these traditions yet, as a democratic republic, had a special need of them to ensure public order. Nor was it simply a matter of controlling the masses; the upper classes also required art to prevent them from sinking into gross materialism. Addressing the American Art-Union in 1844, the Reverend Henry W. Bellows declared: "No nation needs its exalting, purifying, calming influences more than ours. We need it to supplant the mean utilitarian tastes which threaten to make us a mere nation of shopkeepers. We need it to soften the harsh features of political zeal, and party strife, the other engrossing business of this people."¹⁰ Nearly sixty years later, these same arguments were being put forth with undiminished force to promote art education in the nation's public schools:

As a people we are somewhat brusque, and it is difficult for us to get on without more or less friction. Nations with infinitely less natural and acquired intelligence are masters in the art of agreeable intercourse, politeness and consideration. Indeed, they seem to be inborn characteristics of some European nations, notably those in which art is an important part of all things, of public and private buildings, richly decorated without and within, and of all public utilities. Whichever way one may turn he is met by harmonious combinations. Nature and art go hand in hand through the length and breadth of those staid old countries, and the people in daily contact with such agreeable surroundings are unconsciously moulded along similar lines and act in harmony with these outward conditions. . . . Our first efforts must be the amelioration of incongruous conditions, the checking of tendencies towards the bizarre, meretricious and ugly disfigurements which are constant irritants to a nervous people who should be brought into contact only with things harmonious and quieting.¹¹

It should be noted that a belief in the moral efficacy of art was, for many, fully compatible with the "art for art's sake" movement of the later

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part of the century. Although some would argue that art must have an explicitly moral content in order to produce the desired effect, the predominant emphasis, especially after the Civil War, was on beauty, independent of subject matter. In an article published in 1898, the president of the Chicago Women's Club pointed out that the greatest art-producing civilizations of the past (such as Periclean Athens, Renaissance Italy, and seventeenth-century France) were notoriously immoral by modern standards, as, in many cases, were the subjects their artists depicted—for example, the Venuses of Titian. An immoral or simply amoral work of art, however, could still be a great instrument of good:

Art has a vital relation to morality, but we must seek it not in its didactic teaching, but in beauty, which always exerts a refining influence, tending to soften manners and elevate character. . . . Here is where the moral mission of art is to be sought—in the elevating influence of pure delight filling life with joy and beauty, and by these making the world happier and better. . . . Is it not the distinct mission of painting, poetry and music to soothe the soul weary with the cares of life, to make a city of refuge in the realms of fancy, to give moments of delight in a world of beauty and joy where no moral judgments are demanded of us, and where poise and serenity of mind may be gained; to enable us again to enter the arena of the actual world, from whose struggle no mortal is long released?¹²

For many affluent and cultivated Americans, “the moral mission of art” assumed the character of an evangelistic creed. In *Art's True Mission in America* (1853), Augustine Duganne exhorted his countrymen to bring the blessings of art to “hut and prison.” He wrote: “To evangelize men, first give them to eat. To refine a people, make them comfortable and familiarize their minds to the enjoyment of the beautiful.” The eloquent Congregationalist clergyman Henry Ward Beecher urged the wealthy, as a Christian duty, to share beauty with the less fortunate masses:

Nothing can make others so rich, without diminishing our own means, as generosity in the use of art-treasure, of materials of beauty. . . . Nothing can well redeem the possession of beauty in a large degree, from the charge of sinful self-indulgence, but such a use of it as shall confer pleasure on all those who need the solace and ministrations of the divine element of beauty.¹³

By the 1890s the aesthetic mission was being carried out by dedicated social workers, who regarded the beneficent influences of art as essential to bettering the lot of the urban poor. Chicago's famed Hull-House, founded in 1889, brought to the inhabitants of the city's slums lectures on the history of art, a circulating collection of fine art reproductions, and frequent loan exhibitions of oil paintings, watercolors, and prints. "There is abundant testimony," wrote cofounder Jane Addams in 1895, "that the lectures and pictures have quite changed the tone of their minds; for they have become, of course, perfectly familiar with the photographs of the best things, and have cared for them, not 'as a means of culture', but as an expression of the highest human thought and perception."¹⁴ In June 1892, the New York University Settlement Society launched a series of free loan exhibitions in the lower East Side; and the university settlements of Boston followed suit a few months later. Noted artists and wealthy collectors gladly lent their paintings to these endeavors, which were closely modeled upon the successful exhibitions held at Toynbee Hall in London's notorious East End slums. As in London, the educational aspects were assisted by cheap explanatory catalogues and free lectures. The results were encouraging. Commenting on Boston's South End Free Exhibition of March–April 1893, a writer for *Harper's Weekly* observed that crowds had averaged fifteen hundred people a day, many of whom had taken an intelligent interest in the pictures. To them, he concluded, "a light has surely come from another world—a world in which sordidness and toil are not the only things of moment, and where it may be seen that there is other work to be doing besides that of brawn."¹⁵

Working-class art exhibitions were, however, exceptional in late nineteenth-century America. Carnegie's fellow cultural philanthropists, especially those in the rapidly developing cities of the nation's interior, were more interested in preaching the Gospel of Art through public exhibitions and galleries aimed at middle-class audiences. Charles L. Hutchinson, president of the Art Institute from 1882 to 1924, may be taken as representative of the breed—indeed, more representative than the idiosyncratic Carnegie. Like Carnegie, he believed devoutly in the obligations of wealth (the selfish rich, he declared, were "mere sponges, absorbing all and giving nothing . . . no better than burglars") and in the uplifting influence of high culture, but he rarely spoke of "the masses" and "the toilers." His great concern was to rescue businessmen from the degrading effects of rampant materialism.¹⁶ "Are we not losing sight of the

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being created in the image of God, with heart and intellect and soul?" Hutchinson asked in an 1888 address, "Are we not losing sight of the human being in the business man?" His answer was that we were, and that the remedy for this was art, which "in the midst of this busy material life of our day . . . may call upon us to halt, and turn our thoughts away from so much that is of the earth earthy, and lead us to contemplate those eternal truths which after all most concern the children of God."¹⁷

Although the Pittsburgh exhibitions were more similar in tone to the annual exhibitions held at the Art Institute from the 1880s on than to the settlement exhibitions of New York and Boston, Carnegie's rhetoric was considerably in advance of Hutchinson's. It was only after the turn of the century that the Chicagoan came round to a more democratic view and could write: "Art is not destined for a small, a privileged class. Art is democratic. It is of the people and for the people."¹⁸

Carnegie could have received the Gospel of Art from many sources, but his principal source was undoubtedly the English poet and critic Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), whose views were as well known and influential in America as in his homeland. The two men met at a London dinner party in June 1883, at the very beginning of Carnegie's philanthropic career, and they became close friends.¹⁹ Arnold occupied a place in Carnegie's intellectual pantheon that was very little inferior to Spencer's: he was "the man whom I am so thankful for having known and so favored as to call friend . . . the true teacher in advance of his age, the greatest poetic teacher in the domain of 'the future and its viewless things'."²⁰

Indeed, the main points of Carnegie's ideas on cultural philanthropy were Arnoldian rather than Spencerian. Arnold passionately believed that "culture" — which he defined as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know . . . the best which has been thought and said in the world" — was essential to the improvement of humanity and should be disseminated as widely as possible. "Culture looks beyond machinery," he wrote in 1869:

Culture hates hatred, culture has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light. It has one even yet greater! — the passion for making them prevail. It is not satisfied until we all come to a perfect man; it knows that the sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with sweetness and light.

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Like Carnegie, but anticipating him by several years, he recognized among the masses the presence of rare and gifted souls, who might flourish with the right encouragement: "In each class there are born a certain number of natures with a curiosity about their best self . . . persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection; and . . . this number is capable of being diminished or augmented." Arnold's creed was at least as optimistic as Spencer's (as it would have to be to hold any appeal for Carnegie), but it allowed more scope for individual endeavor than did the inexorable natural laws of Social Darwinism. The quest for perfection through culture, he assured his readers, "is the master-impulse even now of the life of our nation and of humanity, somewhat obscurely perhaps for this actual moment, but decisively and certainly for the immediate future," and he hailed those who worked for its attainment as "the sovereign educators."²¹

Carnegie and Arnold, however, disagreed sharply in their estimates of the cultural development of the United States. In 1886 Carnegie published his *Triumphant Democracy, or Fifty Years' March of the Republic*, in which he boasted that, owing to its democratic institutions, America was rapidly outstripping Europe in every field of human activity, spiritual as well as material. Those who maintained that the arts could flourish only under the patronage of monarchs and aristocrats were, he argued, utterly mistaken: "The equality of the citizen is the fundamental law upon which is founded all that brings sweetness and light to human life."²² The arts, by their very nature were republican — individual genius counted for everything, hereditary rank and privilege for nothing — and therefore could be expected to thrive in America. Carnegie claimed they were doing precisely that. In the field of the representational arts, for example, Americans were to be reckoned among the world's shrewdest and most liberal patrons, and American artists, having created a landscape school of unsurpassed excellence, were quickly coming to the fore in other branches of painting as well.²³ He concluded:

In art and music this nation is advancing with a rapidity which belies the assertion that the tendency of a Democracy is to materialize a people and give it over to sordid thoughts; that the unrestrained exercise of personal liberty ends only in the accumulation of dollars. Republicanism does not withhold from life the sweetness and light which mainly make it worth living. . . . It is now certain that in love of

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art and music the Democracy even to-day is not behind the monarchy, and evidence is not wanting that it is entering more and more into, and elevating, year after year, not only the few, but the great masses which make up the national life of the republic.²⁴

The idea that a republican form of government, coupled with material prosperity, tends to encourage high culture and promote its spread to all levels of society enjoyed a high degree of intellectual respectability in America at that time. This was precisely the position of Charles Eliot Norton, the nation's leading art historian, who cited the examples of Athens, Venice, and Florence in its support. However, in his opinion the United States had hardly begun to live up to its potential; its civilization was vulgar and mediocre, dominated by the uneducated taste of the masses.²⁵

Arnold, who regarded democracy as "acute and energetic, but tasteless, narrow-minded and ignoble," fully agreed with Norton's assessment of the American situation. Carnegie's boasts, which from their reiteration of the Arnoldian catchphrase "sweetness and light" would appear to have been specifically directed to him, wholly failed to impress him. He urged his friend Sir Mountstuart Duff to read *Triumphant Democracy* but observed that Carnegie

and most Americans are simply unaware that nothing in the book touches the capital defect of life over here [Arnold was visiting America]; namely that, compared with life in England, it is so uninteresting, so without savour and without depth. Do they think to prove that it has savour and depth by pointing to the number of public libraries, schools and places of worship?

Arnold repeated this criticism at greater length, but without any overt reference to Carnegie, in an essay published in the *Nineteenth Century* for April 1888:

Partial and material achievement is always being put forward as civilisation. We hear a nation called highly civilised by reason of its industry, commerce and wealth, or by reason of its liberty or equality, or by reason of its numerous churches, schools, libraries and newspapers. But there is something in human nature, some instinct of growth, some law of perfection, which rebels against this narrow account of the matter. And perhaps what human nature demands in civilisation,

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over and above all those obvious things which first occur to our thoughts — what human nature, I say, demands in civilisation, if it is to stand as a high and satisfying civilisation, is best described by the word *interesting*.

American civilization was emphatically not “interesting”; it lacked “distinction and beauty,” especially in the arts. However, in a May 1882 essay Arnold had suggested a remedy — that the American “friends of civilisation” cease “hopping backwards and forwards across the Atlantic” and devote themselves to the cultivation of sweetness and light at home.²⁶

The establishment of the Carnegie Institute as a vast cultural complex rather than as a simple public library and the fact that it was founded in Pittsburgh would appear to owe a great deal to the close personal relationship between Arnold and Carnegie, which gave added force to the ideas of cultural philanthropy current at the time. Carnegie’s late friend not only inspired him to become one of the “sovereign educators” of humanity; he also challenged him to prove that sweetness and light could flourish in a republic, and that American civilization was, or could be rendered, interesting. And where better to conduct the experiment than in Pittsburgh, the city upon which Carnegie’s fortune was founded, the city that he proudly showed to foreign visitors as an exemplar of America’s industrial wealth and power, but a city that (measured by Arnoldian standards) was grossly materialistic and wholly uninteresting? Thanks to the Institute, Carnegie predicted,

not only our own country, but the civilized world, will take note of the fact that our Dear Old Smoky Pittsburgh, no longer content to be celebrated only as one of the chief manufacturing centres, has entered upon the path to higher things, and is before long, as we thoroughly believe, also to be noted for her preeminence in the arts and sciences.²⁷

Carnegie’s hopes for Pittsburgh may strike us today as utopian, but by 1895 when the doors of the new Carnegie Institute opened an event had occurred that many thoughtful observers regarded as incontrovertible proof that a vulgar, provincial, materialistic American city could rise almost overnight to the heights of cultural eminence: the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. Prior to the exposition, Chicago’s reputation had been at least as bad as Pittsburgh’s. “Having seen it,

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I urgently desire never to see it again,” wrote Rudyard Kipling in 1889, expressing a sentiment that many visitors to the city, both foreign and American, would have endorsed. “It is inhabited by savages. Its water is the water of the Hugli, and its air is dirt.”²⁸ A few years later, John J. Ingalls recalled the incredulity that greeted the idea of holding a world’s fair at Chicago:

The original suggestion of the name was received with mingled derision and disdain. . . . It was not serious. It was a frontier joke, an advertisement, a bid for notoriety. The city was so far inland that failure was inevitable. And after the location was determined, the cynics sneered and the scoffers jeered, and instead of hearty, generous, cordial, patriotic coöperation, there was indifference, jealousy and malevolence.

But Chicago, led by its wealthy elite, exceeded every expectation:

the men who had built the railroads and warehouses, and grown rich by the barter in cattle and hogs and corn, saw the greatness of the opportunity which stood at their gates. They summoned a congress of artists, architects, painters, sculptors, landscape gardeners, and commissioned them to design and execute a scheme commensurate with the objects for which it was intended: the assemblage of the highest achievements of civilization; the fraternal rivalry of nations; the uplifting of the human race. The conception was Napoleonic, and the result is an epoch in history. Other expositions will be judged as they approach or recede from this ideal. Chicago is no longer provincial. She has established her claim to take first rank among the great capitals of the world.²⁹

And, by extension, America established its claim to take first rank among the great nations of the world. “Chicago, the enormous town we see expanding, the gigantic plant which grows before our eyes, seems now in this wonderfully new country to be in advance of the age,” wrote the French novelist and critic Paul Bourget. “But is not this more or less true of all America?”³⁰

Many visitors to the fair’s White City were most impressed by the indications of technological and scientific progress, whereas some found compelling evidence for actual or potential excellence in the arts. “Art and Music and Poetry belong to Chicago,” proclaimed the English novel-

ist Walter Besant, “the Hub of the Universe is transferred from Boston to Chicago; this place must surely become, in the immediate future, the center of the nobler world — the world of Arts and Letters.”³¹ To others it was less a matter of Chicago and Boston than of America and the world:

When the White City was built in 1893 art assumed a definite place in our national life. Then for the first time we awoke to a realisation that art of the people, by the people, for the people had come to us. It came to this New World in the old historic way. From the seed sown in the Orient, through Greece, through Italy from Byzantium, wafted ever westward, its timid flowering from our Atlantic seaboard had been carried a thousand miles inland to find its first full eclosion; not as a single growth, but as the triple flower of architecture, painting, and sculpture.³²

There were even those who held that the New World was not merely becoming the equal of the Old World in the arts but was actually superseding it.³³ Taken all together, the technological, architectural, and artistic marvels of the White City seemed to confirm the most extravagant boasts of *Triumphant Democracy*. It was not entirely unreasonable, then, to suppose that Carnegie’s efforts in Pittsburgh would provide additional confirmation.

The Institute’s art gallery was given a distinguished part to play in Carnegie’s experiment in cultural uplift, one that, like the part played by the Palace of Fine Arts at the World’s Columbian Exposition, would promote both local and national goals: it was to help spiritualize the local populace and encourage “the development and maintenance of the coming school of national American art.” This latter goal was to be achieved by the creation of a “chronological collection,” beginning in 1896, that would receive the finest works produced each year by American artists. Carnegie hoped that someday they would “strive to have one of their productions selected as the best of its year, and placed in the historical collection of this gallery, as today they strive to be admitted to the Luxembourg, and through the Chantrey Bequest, to the British National Gallery.” And he intimated that this day was not likely to be remote.³⁴

Carnegie’s initial plans for the chronological collection, formulated in 1895, made no specific mention of an annual exhibition; but such an exhibition — which would serve to supply the collection just as the Paris Salons supplied the Luxembourg and the Royal Academy exhibitions

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supplied the Chantrey Bequest — was a logical corollary of his design and obviously in keeping with his desire to make Pittsburgh the artistic arbiter of the nation. He did, in fact, express a preference that the collection be selected from works exhibited in the gallery, and on at least one occasion he likened the proposed collection to the Salon, which he had described in *Triumphant Democracy* as “the highest art tribunal in the world.”³⁵ According to William Nimick Frew, president of the Institute and Carnegie’s friend and advisor, “something as nice as a salon in Paris” was what the philanthropist wished to give Pittsburgh. In 1898, when the annual exhibition was well established, Carnegie unambiguously declared his intentions for it: “What the opening of the Salon is for France, the Academy for Britain, we now expect to make for this continent the opening of the exhibition which you are to celebrate today.”³⁶

Although the idea of creating an American Salon in Pittsburgh may have been Carnegie’s, the idea of an annual exhibition was not. A poll conducted by the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* in December 1894, shortly after it became public that Carnegie intended to endow his gallery with \$50,000 a year, revealed that virtually all the leading local artists favored using part of the endowment to subsidize an annual or semiannual exhibition, which would offer prizes generous enough to secure the best work of the best-known artists. Most artists envisioned a series of exclusively American exhibitions on the lines of those held by the National Academy of Design and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts; however, the sculptor William Priestestersbach proposed an exhibition of international scope to be juried by an international committee.³⁷

These suggestions probably influenced the plans for the new gallery, for Carnegie was sensitive to local opinion and organized the Institute’s administration in such a way as to ensure that it would be taken into consideration. He appointed a board of trustees composed of the city’s most prominent business and professional men to govern the affairs of the Institute. The board, in turn, appointed eight of its members to serve on the Fine Arts Committee, which controlled the gallery. This committee enjoyed almost perfect autonomy: the only specific requirement that Carnegie imposed was the formation of the chronological collection; apart from that, the committee members were free to conduct their affairs as they saw fit.³⁸

The artists interviewed by the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* in 1894 were unanimous that the new gallery should be managed by experienced artists,

critics, and connoisseurs, but Carnegie strongly disagreed. Experts, he told Frew, were too narrow-minded: “for this reason, painters of the day ridiculed Millet as vulgar; the musicians of the day, Wagner as insane; writers of the day, Shakespeare as bombastic. The future is to laugh at many pictures which experts are extolling today, and art-amateurs are buying to be in the fashion, and at many books which are supposed to have the elements of enduring fame.” He felt that his endowment would be better administered by “men of affairs” who, though they might seek advice from experts, would not be influenced by professional rivalries and allegiances to particular schools of art. He also wanted the committee to include members recruited “directly from the people,” because “unless the institution be kept in touch with the masses, and therefore popular, it cannot be widely useful.”³⁹ This was a matter of deep concern to Carnegie. In his 1895 dedication speech, he deplored “the cant of art” and the fact that “each petty school calls aloud that it has the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” But, he continued,

No school can embrace the whole, since art is universal, and the judgement of the masses of the people is finally to prove the truest test of the supreme in art, as it admittedly is in literature. Let us hope that the pictures exhibited here from time to time will be of all schools, and reach both extremes—the highest critic and the humblest citizen . . . and attract not only the few but the many.⁴⁰

Here again is an echo of Arnold, who in *Culture and Anarchy* had warned against those who would “try to indoctrinate the masses with the set of ideas and judgements constituting the creed of their own profession or party.” This, Arnold maintained, was not true culture, for culture does not try to win adherents to a particular sect, but “seeks to do away with classes and sects; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere.”⁴¹

Although Carnegie did not personally appoint the members of the Fine Arts Committee, the fact that they were selected from the board of trustees ensured that most of them would be men of affairs. Only two artists—Alfred Bryan Wall and Joseph Ryan Woodwell—served on the board, and Woodwell was as much a businessman as an artist, being the proprietor of a successful hardware store. From 1896 to 1901 the remaining six seats on the committee were filled by leading business and professional men: Henry Clay Frick and William McConway were industrial-

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ists; William Nimick Frew was an oilman; David Thompson Watson and James Murdock Clark were lawyers; John Grier Holmes was a banker; Edward Manning Bigelow was a civil engineer and Pittsburgh's director of Public Works; and John Caldwell, the committee's chairman, was the treasurer of the Westinghouse Airbrake Company. Obviously, none of the members were drawn "directly from the people," but several had risen from lowly origins. Caldwell and McConway, for example, had both emigrated from Ireland as children; Clark had begun life as a farm boy. Carnegie — who liked to portray himself as "one who was himself a wage earner, and who has the good of that class greatly at heart" — doubtless considered their proletarian credentials as valid as his own, and sufficient to keep the gallery in touch with the masses.⁴²

The committee, however, was by no means as devoid of expertise as Carnegie had envisioned, even ignoring its two bona fide artists. Frew owned a small but choice collection of paintings; Caldwell owned a larger collection of paintings, as well as a collection of etchings, rich in Rembrandts and Whistlers, reputed to be one of the finest in the country. D. T. Watson was also a noted connoisseur: "He can instinctively tell a Corot, or a Daubigny; a Bonheur or Schreyer, a Turner or Reynolds," wrote a local reporter in 1899, "so adept has he become by reason of his many years of picture purchasing and art culture."⁴³ Frick had been collecting since the early 1870s, when he was described, in a report to a Pittsburgh banker to whom he had applied for a loan, as "a little too enthusiastic about pictures, but not enough to hurt."⁴⁴ In the 1890s Frick had not yet begun to acquire old masters; his tastes, like those of the other collectors on the committee, were solidly contemporary, Francophile, and middle-of-the-road. Caldwell occasionally bought a modern American painting, and Watson had several examples of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English school, but their collections were dominated by Barbizon and Barbizon-influenced European landscapes, with an admixture of such admired academics as Jean-Léon Gérôme, Rosa Bonheur, Adolphe Bouguereau, and Jean-Jacques Henner. The same French plein-airist taste inspired the work of J. R. Woodwell and A. B. Wall. Woodwell, whose studio Frick loved to visit on Sunday afternoons to chat about art, had studied painting at Barbizon for several years in the 1860s. Wall specialized in scenes of shepherds and their flocks that strongly recall the work of the popular Barbizon-inspired Dutch painter Anton Mauve (figures 2, 3).⁴⁵

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One position in the gallery's administration that absolutely required professional expertise was that of the director of fine arts. The director would manage its day-to-day business, treat personally with artists, critics, dealers, and collectors, and be in the eyes of the world the most visible exponent of the new enterprise. A nationally known artist or critic would have been the logical choice for this position — and there is little doubt Carnegie could have found one had he set his mind to it — but, true to the principle of local control, the man selected was a native Pittsburgher, John Wesley Beatty (figure 4). Born in 1851, Beatty was the son of a Pittsburgh grocer. Although he began his career in art as a silver engraver in the 1870s, his interests and aspirations extended far beyond the merely decorative, and he spent much of his spare time sketching and painting, often in the company of another hopeful young artist, John White Alexander. From 1876 to 1878 he studied at the Royal Bavarian Academy in Munich, which at the time was extremely popular with American art students. There he met William Merritt Chase, John Twachtman, Frank Duveneck, and several others who were to become major figures in American art, and he renewed his friendship with Alexander. After returning to Pittsburgh, he resumed his old craft of silver engraving, contributed occasional illustrations to both local and national magazines, and established a small but sound reputation for himself as a skillful painter and etcher of farm scenes that invariably included horses (figure 5). He taught at the Pittsburgh School of Design for Women and in 1887 founded a small art school with George Hetzel, the city's leading landscape painter (figure 6).⁴⁶

Beatty's association with Carnegie began in 1890, when Carnegie asked the Pittsburgh Art Society to organize a loan exhibition for the opening of the Carnegie Free Library in Pittsburgh's sister city of Allegheny (now Pittsburgh's North Side). Most of the work fell to Beatty, who had served as the society's secretary and treasurer from its founding in 1886. By the fall of 1894, the trustees of the Carnegie Institute were discussing the possibility of a similar, but larger, exhibition to mark its opening the following year, and one of them, the wealthy collector Henry K. Porter, began a correspondence with Beatty on the subject. Beatty was enthusiastic: "Count on me for anything I can do," he wrote, "even to the helping to raise the money." Porter was quite willing to count on him; in fact, he took it for granted that Beatty, as secretary of the Art Society, would perform the same task he had undertaken in 1890. The trustees,

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Porter told Beatty on 17 October 1894, were not prepared to make an immediate decision regarding the loan exhibition, but, he added, "I do not believe that you would be anticipating their action unduly in entering upon any preliminary correspondence that might be of value to be started at a very early day."⁴⁷ The exhibition, Carnegie's second effort at spreading the Gospel of Art, was a success, and Beatty was appointed to the directorship in March 1896. By all accounts, he was Carnegie's personal nominee for the position, and the board of trustees voted unanimously in his favor.⁴⁸

It is clear from contemporary descriptions of Beatty that his character was such as to inspire trust and respect in Carnegie and his fellow businessmen. W. B. Morris, a writer for the *Pittsburgh Press*, described him as one of those rare men "in whom business instincts and artistic talent are combined":

At a glance, one would never take Mr. Beatty for an artist. He somehow lacks the manner one has become accustomed to expect in a member of the craft. A satisfied businessman is the impression one gets. His eyes are quick and piercing, his bearing alert, and his conversation brisk and to the point. There's no idle questioning, no vapors or long discussions, the sentences mean something, and there are no more of them than the subject demands. The man must have his moments of quiet, dreamy temperament, however, for his work is of a quiet, poetical nature; but at the galleries this temperament is set aside. It's business there; nothing more.

Another local journalist summed up Beatty's character more succinctly: "John Wesley Beatty never will call to mind a sunset on the seashore or nymphs sporting by the fountain's brink."⁴⁹

As Morris pointed out, however, Beatty *was* an artist, and a very talented and knowledgeable one at that. He told Morris that he delighted in intimate discussions about art "with the men who do the things, and who speak of subtle meanings and qualities incomprehensible to the average observer."⁵⁰ Beatty was able to hold his own in such discussions, and his artistic discernment, coupled with an affable and diplomatic character, enabled him to win the confidence and esteem of artists. That he was not himself widely known as an artist was probably more of a help than a hindrance: an artist of wide reputation might have enhanced the prestige of the Institute in its early years, but he might also have brought with him

professional loyalties and enmities that would have impaired the universality Carnegie hoped to achieve. From the beginning, Beatty was identified, not with any particular school of art, but with the Carnegie Art Gallery, and his tastes were both catholic and progressive.

Beatty's taste in art is relevant to an understanding of the character of the exhibitions held under his directorship. Although subject to the authority of the Fine Arts Committee, and after 1897 to the authority of three foreign advisory committees and an elected jury as well, his power and influence were enormous. It was Beatty who visited the major art centers of Europe and America to solicit the participation of artists, who compiled the lists of invitees and prospective jurors, who recruited members for the foreign committees. He could, at the very least, make it difficult for any artist he disliked to exhibit at Pittsburgh. The absence of Modernism in the later exhibitions organized by Beatty might easily give the impression that his influence was strongly conservative.

This impression is strengthened by reading *The Relation of Art to Nature*, Beatty's fullest exposition of his aesthetic creed. Published in 1922, the year he retired, this work sets forth his conviction "that the art of the painter and sculptor is imitative, not creative; that the great masterpieces of art which have withstood the test of time rest firmly upon the supreme expression of character and beauty as these qualities are revealed in man and nature; that it is the mission of art to reveal and make plain these rare and lovely qualities."⁵¹ Beatty dismissed as a popular misconception the idea of the artist as an inspired creator of beauty: art is *never* superior to nature, and the artist's whole talent lies in his ability to perceive the beauties of nature and faithfully reproduce them. Both personal expression and technique receive short shrift in Beatty's philosophy, the former as a minor element that inevitably arises from the artist's choice of subject and presentation, the latter as merely the "obvious and superficial aspect" of a work of art. As one might expect, Beatty took a dim view of Modernism: in 1913, the year of the Armory Show, he brushed aside "this so-called school of art" as a "passing fad," unworthy of serious consideration; and in 1924, the year of his death, he charged the Modern movement with charlatanism, sensationalism, vulgarity, and incompetence.⁵²

Beatty published no aesthetic manifestos in the 1890s, but it is apparent from scattered statements that then, as in the 1920s, truth and beauty were the foundations of his creed.⁵³ However, the same views that stamped him as a diehard conservative in the 1920s appeared progressive in the ar-

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tistic climate of the 1890s — not, indeed, ahead of their time, but certainly up-to-the-minute. Modernism lay in the near but unforeseeable future: the Fauves would not burst upon the world until the Salon d'Automne of 1905; Picasso would not paint *Les Femmes d'Alger* until 1907; the pioneering works of Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne were unknown to all but a small group of avant-gardists. For most art-conscious people in America and Europe, the cutting edge of modern painting was still Impressionism. Beatty's taste enthusiastically embraced not only Impressionism, which he praised for exemplifying in art the truthful, scientific spirit of the age, but also the controversial, unflinching Realism of Thomas Eakins, the Tonalism of Whistler, and the Symbolism of the Munich Secession and Giovanni Segantini. He was very much in agreement with the proponents of "art for art's sake," arguing that language was the proper medium for ideas and stories, and that art should represent "beauty for beauty's sake alone."⁵⁴ Compared to a genuine conservative of the period such as Kenyon Cox (who deplored all nineteenth-century Realism as the mindless, literal transcription of nature, and who advocated a wholesale retreat to Renaissance and Baroque traditions), Beatty appears to be almost radical in his views.⁵⁵

To his businesslike demeanor and skills and his broad knowledge and appreciation of art, Beatty added another great virtue: he shared Carnegie's vision. "The influence of the collection of paintings which will doubtless be assembled in the Carnegie Gallery," he wrote in 1895, "will spread and widen until it permeates the entire community. . . . Our children and their posterity will receive a rich inheritance not easily dissipated, because it will become a part of the fibre of every man and woman, and therefore of the whole community. This makes the dedication of this art building an inspiration to our people."⁵⁶ He also believed that the gallery's influence would be more than local, that it would help make Pittsburgh an important art center: "The gallery will reach pretentious proportions, there is no doubt about that," he told reporters on New Year's Day 1896.

Pittsburgh's location is conducive to the success of such a project. I think it has been amply demonstrated that the art galleries of the United States will not hug the seashore. There was a time when the biggest collections were in New York and Philadelphia, but that is past. See what was at Chicago during the world's fair. Chicago, being

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so near the center of population, more people viewed those paintings than if they had been in New York. In like manner, Pittsburgh is the center of a large number of cities east of the Rocky Mountains.⁵⁷

Having provided the new gallery with funds and long-range goals and having secured the services of men capable of running it, Carnegie was, for the most part, content to sit back and await results. Occasionally, he offered suggestions, and these suggestions had the force of commands. “Now what is the use in waiting for me to be there?” John Caldwell once asked Beatty, who had wanted to postpone a committee meeting that Caldwell was unable to attend. “What can we do but *approve* the suggestion or action of AC and his friends?”⁵⁸ Such occasions, however, were few. Similarly, the Fine Arts Committee rarely interfered with Beatty’s management, though they had the authority to do so. As the years passed, Beatty would find himself in quiet, but growing, opposition to Carnegie and the committee on the fundamental question of whether the annual exhibitions were the best way, or even a good way, to build the permanent collection. But relations between the various parties remained harmonious. Their mission—to bring “sweetness and light” to Pittsburgh and the nation—was clear to them, and they were confident of achieving it.