



Building from Within

As we have seen in these pages, the Master Plan was an evolving process allowing for a number of changes caused by

many factors, not least of which was the reexamination of museological issues. This review prompted, for example, such major steps as the building of the Wallace Wing for twentieth-century art and, on a lesser scale, conversion of the Johnson Gallery into an area for rotating displays of works on paper (see p. 65). Meanwhile, growth of collections drove the creation of new installations such as the Irving Galleries for the Arts of South and Southeast Asia and the Jan Mitchell Treasury for Precolumbian gold. A greater emphasis on conservation mandated the Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation, and the need for better access and management of our extensive textile holdings prompted the soon-to-open Antonio Ratti Textile Center (see p. 76).

Some changes made to the galleries in the last few years have been more subtle but equally significant. One such example is the renovation of the Great Hall second-floor balcony, thanks to a grant from Stanley Herzman, who also gave the Museum the majority of his fine collection of Chinese porcelains. This project called for a more comprehensive chronological display of our Asian ceramics, primarily Chinese; for a more rigorous selection, with greater emphasis on

absolutely the finest quality; and for more stress on earlier periods, reflecting current taste and collecting patterns. The presentation also aimed for greater sparseness and, with the use of advanced lighting technology, such as fiber optics, has achieved much-improved illumination of the handsomely decorated undersides of many of the pieces. Furthermore, the formerly stark, rectilinear exhibition cases were brought into conformance with the Beaux-Arts vocabulary of Richard Morris Hunt's Great Hall through the addition of appropriately detailed base and cornice moldings. Over time, of course, this installation will itself change—as most do at the Metropolitan—not only to accommodate new acquisitions but to further enhance

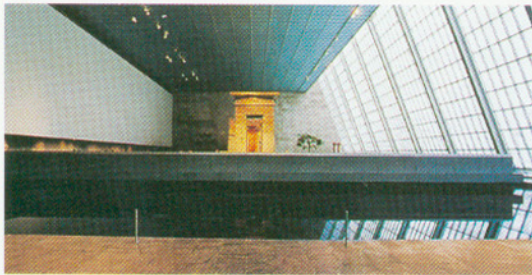
Opposite: In the Nineteenth-Century European Paintings and Sculpture Galleries, The Bronze Age, by Auguste Rodin, French. Cast ca. 1906. Gift of Mrs. John W. Simpson, 1907

Above: Galleries during construction

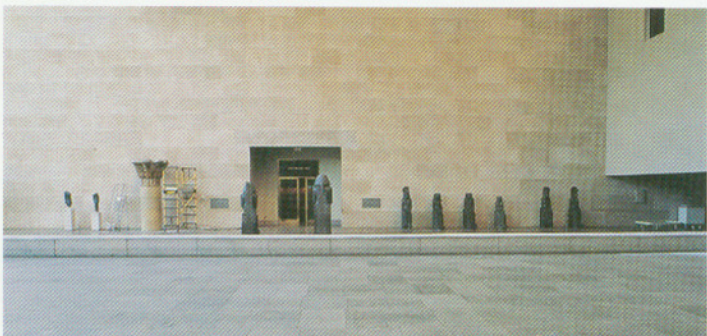


Asian ceramics, including those from the Herzman and Altman collections (left), are exhibited on the renovated Great Hall balcony (above).

The Temple of Dendur before and after removal of the parapet's top course. Now in place are two colossi of Amenhotep III, from the Temple



of Luxor, Thebes. Dynasty 18, ca. 1391–1353 B.C. Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1921



our knowledge of ceramics by showing particular developments such as the influence of Asian porcelain in the West, as seen in Chinese Export or in Delft Blue and White.

The Museum's increasing concern for public access to the collections caused us to cast a fresh eye on the Temple of Dendur and to undertake small but not

inconsequential changes in this area. As I have already mentioned, we made the first inner chamber accessible with minor physical alterations of steps and a ramp. This initiative has been joyfully received by our visitors, who were long frustrated by the forbidding—and forbidden—granite platform separating them from what are among the finest reliefs anywhere on the temple. Nearby, several purchases and a gift of over a hundred Amarna reliefs from Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Rosen have led to an installation on the south wall of the temple enclosure that enlivens this rather stark surface. Stark as well, we felt, were the vast stone expanses surrounding the temple, and Dorothea Arnold, Lila Acheson Wallace Curator in Charge, has given the adjacent space greater interest and life through the addition of the superb reliefs from the Chapel of Ramesses I at Abydos, thanks to a grant from the Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation, Inc., and the placement of a number of sculptures, notably a group of monumental Sakhmet statues, along the east wall.

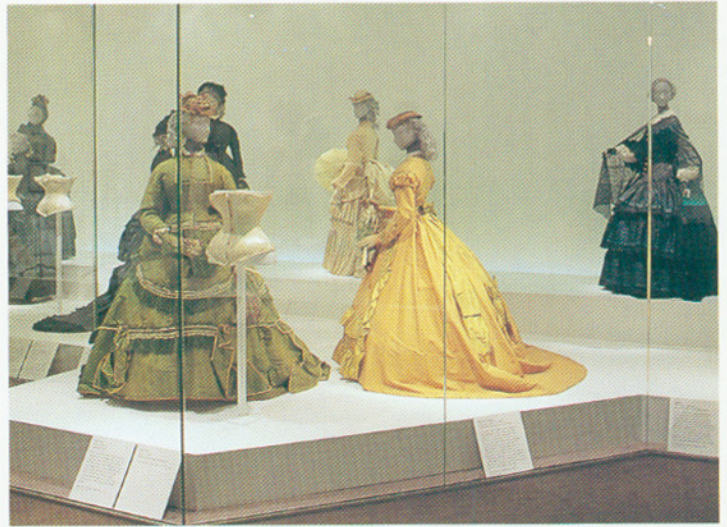
Still further improvement to the Temple of Dendur area was made this summer, when we removed the top course of the tribune's granite parapet, which had served as a bench back but also, unfortunately, as a massive visual barrier to the temple.

A growing desire for more regular and expanded displays of certain elements of the Met's collections, heretofore presented only in the context of special exhibitions, led to the creation of newly configured galleries for costumes and for works on paper. For years, under the inspired leadership of the late Diana Vreeland, the Costume Institute mounted one major exhibition each year, combining works from the collection with

loans. Eventually, as conservation standards in the field imposed ever more severe restrictions to reduce exposure of the costumes to light, the “downtime” between the yearly Costume Institute shows increased to six months or more each year. Recognizing that we could not afford to have so much prime space dark and unused for long periods, nor to keep so much of our extensive collection off view, we decided to redesign the gallery space to make it possible—and affordable—to mount three somewhat smaller exhibitions every year, thereby using the richness of our holdings more creatively and keeping costumes on view year-round. Curator in Charge Richard Martin and Associate Curator Harold Koda have implemented this policy since January 1993 with tremendous success.

The principle of making collections of light-sensitive works of art such as costumes available by frequent rotations has now been applied to works on paper with the conversion in 1993 of the Robert Wood Johnson Jr. Recent Acquisitions Gallery into a space for the continual display of drawings, prints, and photographs. All three of these media are ones in which the Metropolitan has vast, absolutely superb holdings, from which remarkably little has been shown regularly.

Indeed, until 1993 works on paper had been shown in periodic thematic or monographic exhibitions, often focused on only one of these media, with the result that visitors could not be certain whether any drawings, prints, or photographs would be on view the day they came to the Museum. This serious disservice, both to the museum-goer and to the collections, has now been happily rectified, thanks to funds from the Drue Heinz Foundation and the Bodman and Achelis foundations; and it is a joy to see our audience captivated by these marvelous, intimate works of art in the carpeted and com-



fortable Johnson Gallery. Furthermore, because this gallery is on the main axis leading from the European Paintings Galleries to the new Nineteenth-Century Galleries, many who might not ordinarily seek out drawings, prints, and photographs now find themselves deriving great pleasure from them.

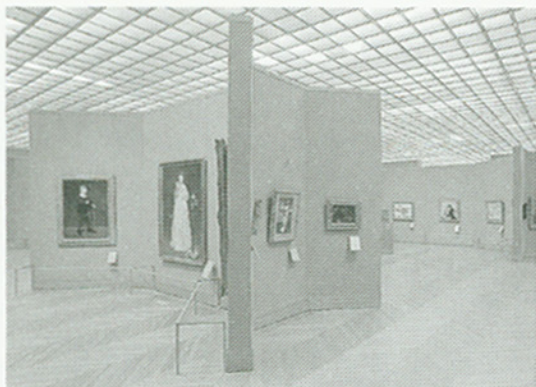
The most important recent gallery change in the building was the renovation of the spaces for nineteenth-century European paintings and sculpture. Unlike the projects just described, which were subtle by comparison, this involved a far more drastic decision, to tear down and redo ab initio a major installation opened within the period under review.

Above top: “Waist Not,” an exhibition in the new Costume Institute, Mar. 29–Aug. 21, 1994

Above bottom: The Robert Wood Johnson Jr. Gallery for works on paper. Renovation supported by the Drue Heinz Foundation and the Bodman and Achelis foundations

*Old and new –
Nineteenth-Century
European Paint-
ings and Sculpture
Galleries*

*Manet works, for-
merly in separate
spaces, are now
concentrated in
one large gallery.*



*Inefficient use of
space and multiple
vistas have been
replaced by more
wall area and a
coherent presenta-
tion.*



Our reasons for taking this dramatic step reflected a profound change at the Museum in the way of presenting European—mostly French—paintings and sculptures of the nineteenth century. Our radically new approach was born of a happy convergence of view-points, my own and that of Engelhard Curator Gary Tinterow.

When the vast space that would be devoted to these collections was originally built in 1972, as the second floor of the incomplete Rockefeller Wing, Sir John Pope-Hennessy, then chairman of the European Paintings department, wanted to exploit the open, clear-span 200-by-120-foot area. Accordingly, he devised a scheme of free-floating partitions that could be placed in almost any configuration, providing, as seemed the order of the day in a number of museums around the world, great flexibility. The bright expanse of daylight and the multiple vistas onto one great Impressionist and Post-Impressionist picture after another were at first sight dazzling. In the end, however, the arrangement proved confusing. The partitions on which the paintings were hung also had a provisional look and turned out not to be as flexible as intended—in fact they were never moved. And, most seriously, the walls did not allow for a hanging scheme that would do justice to the strengths of the collection, namely, its constellations of works by individual artists such as Degas or Manet, and there was no room for growth, although many paintings were acquired in the 1980s.

Therefore in 1989 it was decided that this space should be redesigned, and in 1991, when Walter Annenberg announced the anticipated bequest to the Metropolitan of his fabulous collection of Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, the timing was perfect. We were able to adjust the plans so that the Annenberg Collection could be shown, as he requested, as a unit in the midst of our own holdings.

Our principal goal in redoing the galleries was to provide a more coherent presentation of the collections by expanding the available wall space and creating a setting that we felt was more in keeping with what the nineteenth-century artists might themselves have envisioned for their works—a Beaux-Arts rather than a contemporary style. The result is a suite of classically proportioned galleries that incorporates architectural details adapted from designs done by McKim, Mead and White for the Metropolitan early in this century. These rooms are in harmony not only with the art they contain but with the main Museum building itself.

The galleries honor donors both past and present who supported their construction, including Walter Annenberg, Janice H. Levin, and Iris and B. Gerald Cantor, as well



as André Meyer, whose gift in 1972 helped the Museum to build the space the galleries now occupy. At the inaugural installation we were able to display the fifty-three works from the Annenberg Collection as well as Impressionist pictures that were made promised or partial gifts by a number of other generous patrons, including paintings from Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Dillon and Janice Levin, and a group of sculptures by Rodin from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor

Above: 19th-century sculptures include Rodin's Study for the Monument to Balzac. Bronze, modeled 1897; cast 1972. Gift of Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation, 1984

Foundation. We also unveiled additional works acquired with Annenberg funds, two major paintings by Vincent van Gogh: *Shoes*, a deeply moving work of 1888, and *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, a masterpiece of the Arles period. As of this writing, 1.7 million visitors have enjoyed these new galleries, and their response to the redesign has been overwhelmingly favorable.

Left: Van Gogh's Wheat Field with Cypresses (at left), Purchase, The Annenberg Foundation Gift, 1993, next to the artist's Olive Orchard, from the collection of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg

