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HERNANDEZ



Poussin. *Tancred and Erminia*, c. 1631. Oil on canvas, 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ " \times 57 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Lent by The Hermitage, Leningrad, to the exhibition of master paintings from Russian museums at The National Gallery, Washington, D.C.

WASHINGTON LETTER

by ANDREW HUDSON

Last summer's big show in Washington was the exhibition of "Master Paintings from the Hermitage and the Russian State Museum, Leningrad" at the National Gallery of Art. Consisting of 43 paintings, and due to travel to New York, Detroit, Los Angeles and Houston, the exhibition was negotiated between the Soviet Ministry of Culture and Dr. Armand Hammer, who had previously arranged an exhibition here of "Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Painting from the U.S.S.R." in 1973.

At the National Gallery, the entrance to this year's exhibition was lined with large-scale photographs of the two lending Russian museums; angular shapes in equally large photographs of their interiors—the Pavillon Hall of the Small Hermitage; the Jordan Staircase of the Winter Palace, etc.—fitted nicely in the first, octagonal room. This led onto a gallery containing the group of thirteen Russian paintings from the Russian State Museum, where the various portraits of artists and patrons, including Repin's full-length *Portrait of Tolstoy*, his *Portrait of Anton Rubinstein Conducting* and Bakst's loosely painted, Vuillard-esque *Portrait of Sergei Diaghilev with his Nurse*, seemed almost to have been chosen to underline Russia's contribution to world culture. Many of these paintings reflected the nineteenth century Russian craze for photographic-looking art (though Kramskoy's *Portrait of Shishkin* was quite roughly done, when viewed up close, and less detailed than Ingres); and the illusionist techniques displayed, particularly in the spectacular light effects of Aiva-

zovsky's *View of Constantinople by Moonlight* and Kuinji's *Evening in the Ukraine* (cottages bathed in a pink, sunset glow) made this room a popular and crowded one.

The crowds (which made the exhibition difficult to see—I found the best time for viewing was 8:30 in the evening, half-an-hour before the Gallery closed, and was grateful for the longer summer hours) did not linger, by contrast, in the next room, which had in its first bay a small Gauguin and two paintings each by Matisse and Picasso—possibly because, with their emphasis on simplified, abstract design, these were hard to "see" after the Russian paintings, or less arresting, in terms of technique. (The room with the Rembrandts, that followed, was crowded, again.) I welcomed the calmness of the two Matisse and regretted that they couldn't be enjoyed with the quiet contemplation that they deserved: the *Still Life with "The Dance"* of 1909 had a refreshing breadth to it, and the masterly use of decorative patterns and ambiguous play between flatness and spatial illusion in *The Painter's Family* of 1911 seemed more remarkable with each visit. The many distortions in the latter make sense, from a plastic point of view: the roughly painted, lengthened hand of the painter's son emphasizes his gesture of reaching towards the checkerboard (becoming so many times larger than his sister Marguerite's hand holding the yellow book that tells so vividly against the black of her dress); the peculiar perspectival arrangement of the three stools, evidently intended from the beginning, since the brown carpet is blocked out around them, situates the checkerboard between the two boys, yet posits the feet of the stool which supports it much further forward on the carpet, below the edge of the painting—a device that relates the two brothers to Marguerite, whose brilliant

green slippers seem to stand on the picture frame, while also creating a spaciousness that moves around and under the checkerboard. The rounded drawing of arms and shoulders gives sufficient suggestion of volume to the ochre, red, pink and black of the figures, while at the same time these flat color areas play a role in the over-all abstract design of the painting. (Dabs of the same red as the boys' suits give a vibrancy to the brown of the carpet.) Was this painting, I wondered, a celebration of Matisse's new affluence, of the fact that he and his wife could now afford to keep all the children at home?

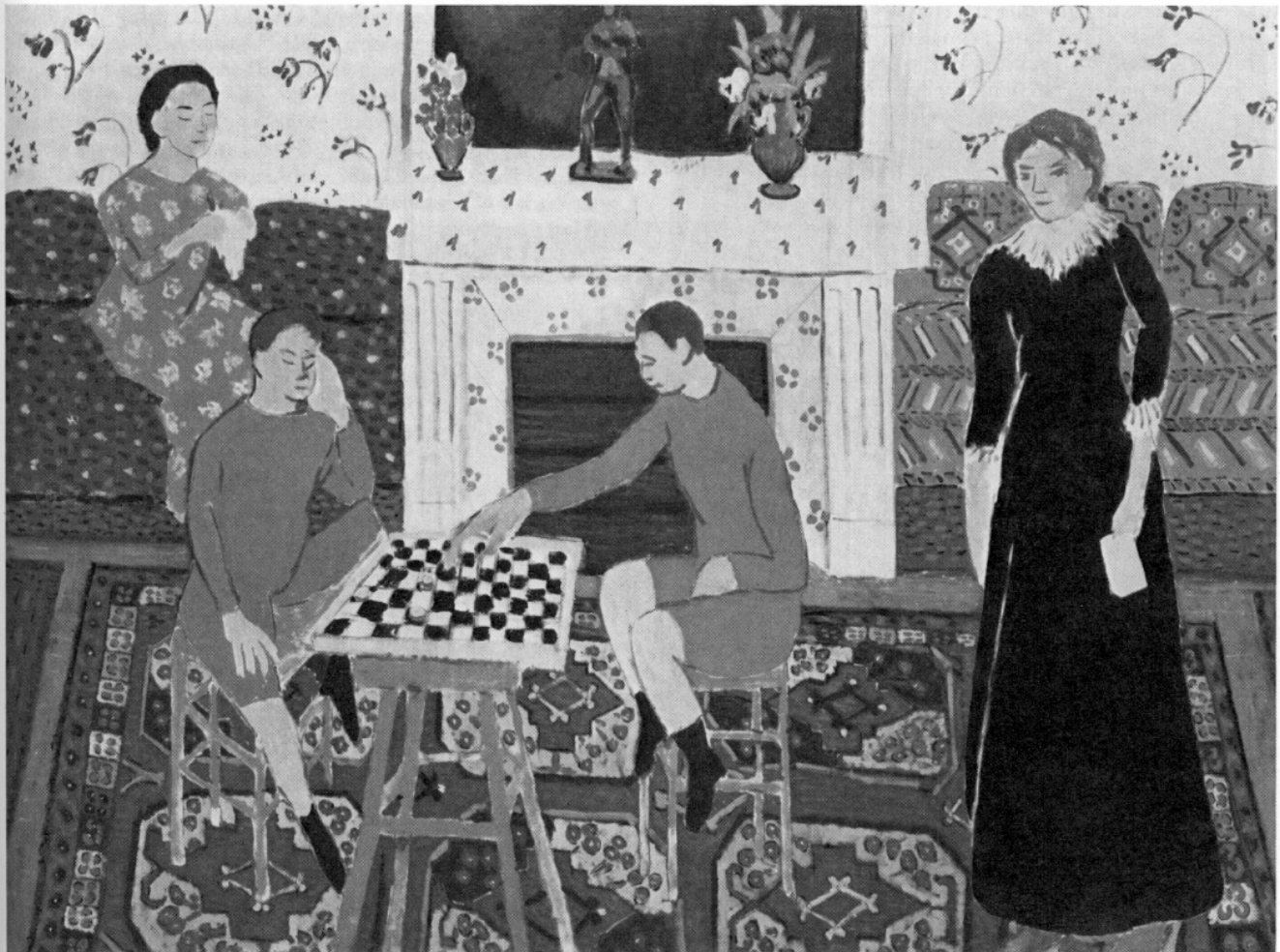
It was interesting to see *The Painter's Family* next to Picasso's *Friendship (L'Amitié)* of 1908. For where the Matisse painting opened and spread outwards, this African-art-influenced Picasso was composed of tightly interlocking, wooden-looking facets and planes, and seemed closed-in, almost sculptural in its effect. The contrast made the Matisse seem more modern, the Picasso more of a period piece.

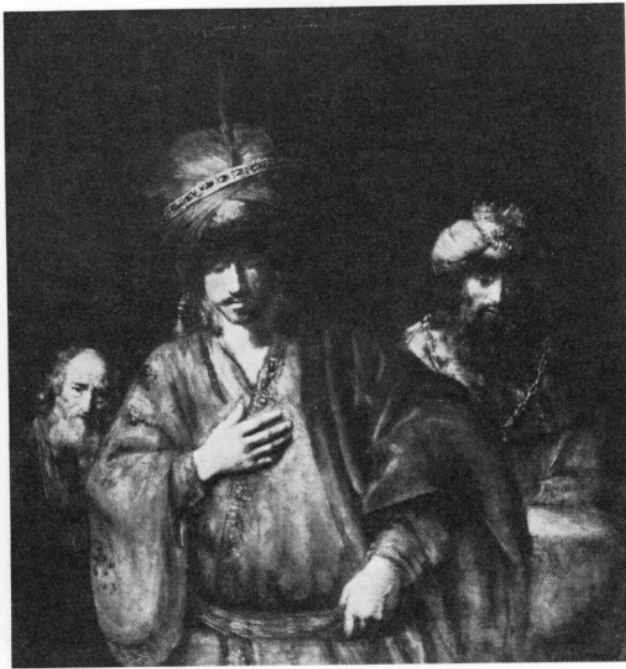
Another revealing comparison between the contemporaries was afforded by the superb paintings by Claude and Poussin, in the last room of the show. I thought the Poussin, *Tancred and Erminia* of c. 1631, one of the most beautiful paintings in the entire exhibition: the extra space at the bottom and right of the figure group gave it an untypical airiness. (It is, presumably, from the early period, whose "dry manner" Sir Joshua Reynolds extolled and preferred.) And how beautifully and tenderly composed is the figure group itself: the various curves that flow into one another (the white horse's rump into Erminia's arm and into the back of the kneeling squire), the

vertical of the white horse (whose forelegs echo the gracefully rhyming legs of the lovers), the counterbalance of the sloping trees and the backing off horse at left, all help to give an impact to the alien, straight-edged cut and thrust of the sword as Erminia sacrifices her hair to bind up Tancred's wounds. In comparison with so intricately organized a work, the Claude, an enchanting *Landscape with Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, of 1661, looked quaint and casually improvised, almost Bellini-like and endearing in its assortment of animals and detailed foreground foliage, its only compositional motivation being a concern to push the "story"—the Roman ruin, the Holy Family with the angel—aside to the edges, so as to leave more space for the far-reaching landscape view.

Among the many other treasures of this exhibition, which included Caravaggio's *The Lute Player*, with its crisp still-life arrangement of music, instruments, flowers and marble-like pears; an early Rembrandt of *Saskia as Flora* with firmly-placed figure and dazzlingly brilliant colors; a small, fine Cézanne *Still-Life*; Fragonard's *The Stolen Kiss (Le Baiser à la dérobée)*; and a superbly painted, vividly lifelike Frans Hals *Portrait of a Man*—among all these, it was the late Rembrandt painting of a biblical scene that most enthralled me. The well-documented catalogue of the exhibition discusses the differences of opinion as to the subject-matter of this painting, bringing us up-to-date with the ongoing argument through the inclusion of an "Erratum" slip saying that its title should read, not "*The Condemnation of Haman (?)*", but "*David and Uriah (Condemnation of Haman?)*". Whatever the subject, it is a very great painting indeed, and the phrase from Panovsky

Matisse. *The Painter's Family*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 56 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 76 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Lent by The Hermitage, Leningrad





Rembrandt. *David and Uriah (The Condemnation of Haman?)*, c. 1665. Oil on canvas, 50" × 45 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Lent by The Hermitage, Leningrad

quoted in the catalogue, "the very difference between good and evil, triumph and defeat, submerged in a communion of muted sadness", seems absolutely appropriate. How beautifully rounded—in Rembrandt's "squared-off" manner—are the face and hands of the central figure; how magnificently glowing the roughly painted reds of the garments; how three-dimensional the jewels and metallic encrustations of the ornamented turban. The heads of the background figures, particularly the more briefly suggested one on the right, are also most moving and tender, in the way in which they are painted and in their facial expression; the curious see-saw motion with which these two heads link up with the arms of the central figure and at the same time enhance the three-dimensional illusion and the sensation that he is moving towards us, gives the painting an added depth of feeling as well as depth of space.

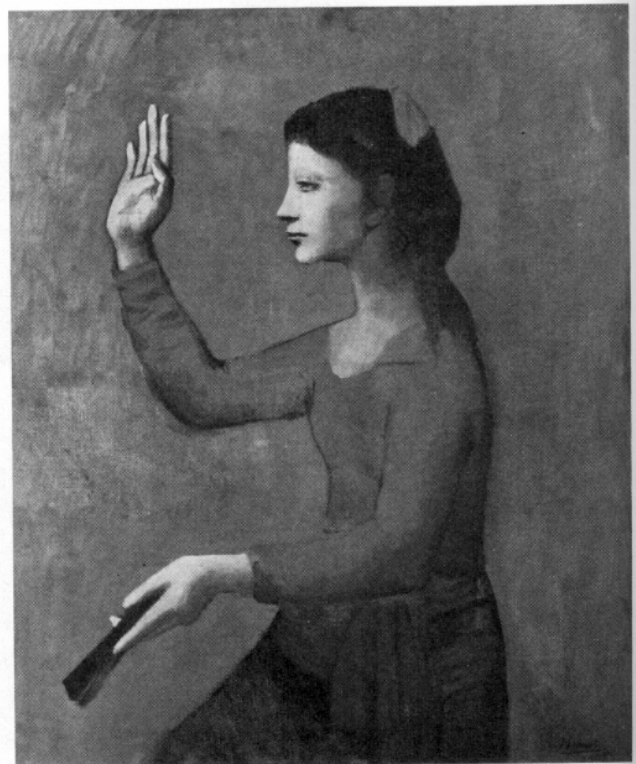
I would have liked to look longer at Chardin's *The Attributes of the Arts* commissioned in 1766 by Catherine the Great, but this was too hard to do, in a narrow room crammed with people. I couldn't help but recall, with some irony, each time that I passed it, that Chardin's replica of this painting, also done in 1766, was on loan to the National Gallery from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (along with a large Poussin, a splendid Degas, and the Institute's late Goya, the deeply moving *Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta*) at the time of the similarly crowded Russian loan show of 1973. I was able, then, to enjoy this Chardin replica (a wonderful painting, which I remember as being somehow sharper and less muted than the Russian original) and this Goya (which I had discovered in previous years was worth going to Minneapolis to see), quietly, and at my leisure, since *these* loans, hung among the National Gallery's paintings by these artists, had not been so publicized and so promoted, and were consequently unnoticed and ignored. (This year, a concurrent, lavishly mounted show of prints and drawings by Jacques Callot was almost completely deserted—which was a shame, for the prints were often amusing, and some of the drawings resembled Watteau's.)

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I went to Baltimore one day in August, to see the Baltimore Museum of Art's summer exhibition of "Andy Warhol: Paintings, 1962–1975" organized by curator Brenda Richardson, and the Museum's Cone collection in its new installation. I find this wing of the Museum enormously improved; the tasteful, harmonious redecoration and re-installation (carried out by the Museum staff) has done wonders in bringing out the quality of the paintings. What were plainly painted walls with a rather unsightly horizontal "hanging groove" running along them have now been covered with an off-white fabric that "floats" above a narrow wooden skirtingboard; the tiled floor is now carpeted in gray; and the ceilings and the top few feet of the walls are painted a deep gray, which gives a sensation of additional spaciousness above, and at the same time helps concentrate the viewer's attention on the paintings below. The new lighting (and perhaps some cleaning, too) brings out the colors of the paintings much more effectively—so much so, that I felt it was almost as though I had never seen some of them before although I had visited this collection dozens of times. Colors now sing out and spring to life in paintings by Matisse that formerly looked dull and gray: *Flower Festival at Nice* of 1922, for example, or *Artist in the Olive Grove* of around the same year. And I also enjoyed much more than before Matisse's still-life, *Anemones and Chinese Vase* of 1922, and his *Girl in a Yellow Dress* of 1929–31, with the many scrubbed out and painted in colors in the dress itself, the many altered positions of the arms, and the freely painted contour drawing, so well integrated with the color.

The new installation also helps to make more sense of the collection as a whole. Although they also bought a number of paintings and works on paper by Picasso of around 1905, and individual works by other artists, such as Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Delacroix, Corot and Manet, in forming their collection, the two sisters Claribel and Etta Cone specialized in Matisse. (The artist's daugh-

Picasso. *Lady with a Fan*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 32". Collection: The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of the W. Averell Harriman Foundation



ter Marguerite said, many years later: "The friendship and buying of the Cones began in 1906 and it was constant and steady thereafter.") The result must be the second largest collection of paintings by Matisse in the United States, after that of the Barnes Foundation, and numerically the largest collection in this country of his sculptures. (The Hirshhorn Museum in Washington has slightly fewer but generally larger pieces.) Whereas, before, the main gallery of the Cone wing contained a mixture of different artists, it now concentrates entirely on Matisse (as does one of the larger side galleries), and the Picasso paintings are now together in a smaller room, with the works by the previous generations of impressionists and post-impressionists grouped in a larger gallery next-door. This is a much more sensible arrangement; also, in the main Matisse gallery, groupings, combined with spacious, syncopated placements arouse the viewer's interest and help the art. (The sculpture, *Reclining Nude III*, of 1929, is shown against the large painting, *The Pink Nude*, of 1935, and its charcoal study; the *Seated Nude* sculpture of 1925 is juxtaposed with *The Blue Nude* painting of 1907.)

I found three other aspects of the new installation especially imaginative. One is the creation of a small room that serves as a screen, at the entrance: made to the dimensions of the rooms in the Cone sisters' Baltimore apartments, and fitted out with some of their original furnishings (which were bequeathed, along with the art, to the Museum), this "replica" gives us a charming and intimate picture of how the collection was first displayed. Another is the blocking off of the distracting windows at the other end of the main gallery by a screen wall, and the creation behind it of a tastefully organized "educational area", consisting of large blown-up photographs of Matisse at work and at rest, a photographic comparison of his figures with those of Picasso, and pertinent quotations from the master himself (such as the one from the end of his 1951 interview with Charbonnier, where Matisse discusses why he sometimes leaves out the eyes and mouth in the faces of his figures.)

A third imaginative innovation is the use of the fifth gallery space, the other small corner room, for temporary exhibitions relating to the collection. On my August visit, this gallery contained a small show on the subject of the illustrated *Poésies de Mallarmé* published by Skira in 1932: some of Matisse's preparatory drawings and rejected etchings from the *Maquette* (purchased in its entirety by Etta Cone); pages from the completed book; and cancelled plates. A progression was revealed. The drawings, obviously done from life, were in Matisse's three-dimensional style, with detail and shading that he subsequently eliminated in the flattened-out contours of the etchings. As the well-written explanatory text to the exhibition put it: "He exaggerated curves and simplified shapes to obtain a visually exciting design." But even more interesting, to me, was the difference between the first, rejected etchings and Matisse's second, approved attempts. For in every case, the final, accepted illustration was better: stronger, harder, uglier, more forceful, as an image. Seeing Matisse work through an idea, in this way, gave a good view of his tough, demanding taste.

(Only one thing was missing, for me, in the Cone wing's air-conditioned re-installation: an armchair to sit down in. Matisse, after all, described his art as "an armchair for the tired intellectual worker or businessman", as though hinting at the best way to enjoy it. However, I suppose that arm chairs would have interrupted the commodious sight-lines of the renovated galleries, where carefully placed, elegant purple box pouffes to sit on do not. My consolation is, I can still look at a great Matisse from

an armchair, in a relaxed, domestic surrounding, at the Phillips Collection, in Washington.)

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The Andy Warhol show at the Baltimore Museum raised other questions, that had to do with attribution, rather than with taste—though taste, too, entered into the problems I became interested in. In my review of this year's Corcoran Biennial exhibition, I commented that Warhol's large *Mao* silkscreen painting of 1973 seemed better than usual, as though he now had "an assistant with some taste." Walking into the Warhol show after looking at Matisse's etchings, and grumbling to myself about its comparative lack of self-criticism and of felt solutions, I suddenly noticed that the giant *Mao* there also stood out as being in a different class than the other Warhols, and I became convinced that this work was executed by the same person as that in the Corcoran show, someone whom I started to call "Assistant 'A'". Compared to the two smaller, haphazardly, puerily painted *Maos* on either side of it, much greater care had been taken, in this work, to synchronize the painted areas with the over-printed, silkscreened image; and there was a *touch* to the work, a painterly handling not present in any of the other works in the room. (As with the large Corcoran Biennial *Mao*, the "interesting" passages took place in the corners: the "feather-formation" of strokes at upper right; the peach pink shading into gray at lower left; the "open" use of bare canvas at lower right.) I felt there was a distinct artistic personality, or sensibility, here; and wondered, if so—if almost all of it had been done by assistants—where in the later work was the true Warhol? I think I found him, in the line drawing of the mass-produced "Mao" wallpaper at the opposite end of

Andy Warhol. *Mao*, 1973. Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, 176½" × 136¼". Baltimore Museum of Art



the room: the zig-zags of the shading here had the same rhetorical quickness and brilliance (or cleverness) as the undulating edge of the opened lid in his handpainted *Big Campbell's Soup Can*, 19 of 1962; and in both, the pencil or brush was lifted off the surface at the end of a curve, in the same well-trained way.

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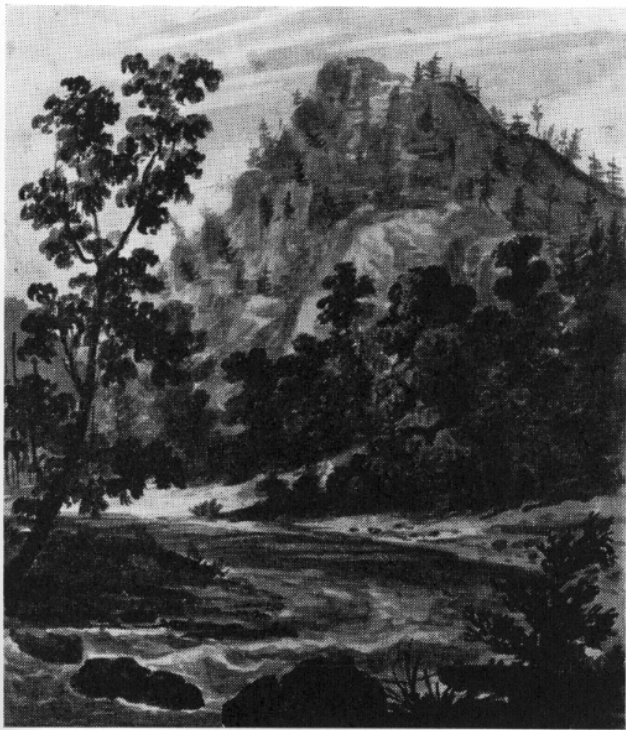
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Pavel Petrovich Svinin. *Delaware Water Gap*. Watercolor. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the exhibition at the Corcoran

Among the “moderns” I particularly enjoyed Joel Levy’s *Hogsback, Walpack Bend* of 1972 with its dark greens and browns and brushy strokes developed *via* Derain out of Cézanne; Joe Fiore’s *The Big View (Walpack Bend)* of 1972–74, closer to nature, with a spaciousness and a sense of pinkish light; Roger Shepherd’s well-shaded etching; and three more “abstract” works that seemed to catch the landscape in its *essence*—two series of small, cut-out planes suggesting mountains and gap, cast in bronze, by Dorothy Dehner, and a geometric, Averyish painting by Warren Rohrer. I wondered if Dehner’s sculptures had led to other, larger works, and wished that, if so, these had been included, for one of my criticisms of the show (and of the program) was its tendency towards littleness, most typified in Jean Reist Stark’s tiny cloisonné enamels and the rather too sketchy small landscapes of Robert Kulicke, who teaches *macchiaioli* painting at the School. (I would suggest that to redress the balance, the Foundation import some watercolorists who also do large landscape paintings, such as Dorothy Knowles of Canada.)

I hope that in about five years’ time, the A.F.E. Foundation will organize another exhibition, to show contemporary work produced there, and to assess its educational impact, by following the subsequent careers of its

students. For it’s possible that this small school, with its dedicated point of view, might prove to be a force in future American art.

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To end: a word of praise for E. A. Carmean, the National Gallery’s new Curator of Twentieth-Century Art. At the time of the other Russian loan show, in 1973, the National Gallery announced its acquisition of a Cubist painting by Picasso, his six-foot tall *Nude Woman* of 1910, by opening a new Picasso room, where it and the other Picassos, from the Chester Dale collection or otherwise given or on loan to the Gallery, were shown together for the first time. Though the room itself seemed a little “thin” (especially when compared to the superb Cubist paintings by Picasso that had come from Russia), this new venture imparted an idea of what the Gallery’s collection of twentieth-century art might look like, in its new wing, to open in 1978. Now, thanks to an extraordinarily effective re-hanging by Carmean, made during the course of the current Russian show, this “thinness” has gone, and the room seems denser and more substantial.

Certain aspects remain unchanged. The *Lady with a Fan* of 1905, given to the Gallery in 1972 by the Hon. W. Averell Harriman in memory of his wife Marie, still seems to me the outstanding painting in the room (the geometry of the gesture, and the more solid modelling with less dependence on line, give this painting a greater feeling of depth; it also seems somehow more “difficult”, unexplainable, enigmatic, than the other paintings). And I still think the critic friend, who, seeing the Cubist *Nude Woman* above the heads of other visitors back in 1973, remarked that it was a better painting when the bottom third was cut off, was right. The present differences in the room arise from the new groupings. The large *Family of Saltimbanques* of 1905 looks a hundred per cent improved, now that it’s flanked by two thickly painted works of the “blue” period, *Le Gourmet* of 1901 and *The Tragedy* of 1903. Even more: having the *Saltimbanques* and *The Tragedy* side by side brings out in each of them the compositional device of grouping figures according to “rhymes” and patterns of shape and gesture, making them stronger and more interesting—just as, on another wall, having *The Lovers* and *Madame Picasso*, both of 1923, next to each other brings out *their* recipe of rubbed out color areas and added drawing, pointing up how cleverly drawn, for example, the faces are. Unlike most “twinned” hangings, these pairs of “twins” *support each other*. And further points are made across the room by hanging Picasso’s *Nude Woman* of 1910 next to his *Still Life* of 1919, where similar trapezoid shapes that now represent, more recognizably, parts of a guitar, a table or a sheet of music, reveal a continuity linking his earlier and later Cubism; and by including more of the Gallery’s Braques, so wavering, melting and textural next to these two abrupt, harsh, jagged Picassos. As a finishing touch, Modigliani’s *Gypsy Woman with Baby* of 1919 comes as a complete contrast—an excellent, unexpected choice. After this creative start, I look forward to other new installations by Mr. Carmean.