

Art Accessible to Everyone



Pincio (2012) by Tom Dowling

In May 2010, Jeanne Kozberg spoke at Chapman University, Orange, CA about the importance of the arts to individuals and to the world. The former Regent of the University of California remarked, "The Getty Foundation aims to further knowledge and nurture critical seeing through the growth and presentation of its collections and by advancing the understanding and preservation of the world's artistic heritage. We believe that art heightens awareness and challenges assumptions. It can become a unifying community building force.

"Quite practically, art can transform the built and natural environment. It helps green space thrive and corridors come alive. It can transform the pathway beneath your feet. On a number of university campuses, public art has become the icon that helps the institution communicate its spirit. The arts, especially the institutions that make their collections accessible to the public, are critically important to a civil society...But, access to the arts was not always available to all the people. Collections were the private property of the wealthy who saw their art as a way to delight themselves and their very special friends. Public museums and collections designed to let the masses enjoy what had been the purview of a privileged few - wealthy individuals, families and private institutions of art - are a relatively new phenomenon.

The Louvre

"The first public museums only began to appear in Europe in the late 17th and early 18th century during the Age of Enlightenment. The first truly public museum, enabling

free access for people of all classes, was the Louvre Museum in Paris, which opened in 1793 incorporating the French royal collections. Interestingly, the Louvre was the centerpiece of a plan by Napoleon I to create a national system of museums. His plan never materialized, but the concept of museums caught on throughout Europe.

"It is said that Charles Willson Peale, an artist who painted many of the patriots of the American Revolutionary war, and also a scientist and naturalist, developed the museum system in the United States. Peale began collecting artifacts and displaying them in his home, but when his collection became too large, he created and moved the collection to what he called the Philadelphia Museum, which opened in the late 18th century.

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"Most importantly, Peale wanted his museum to be accessible to 'both the learned and the unwise.' He knew intuitively how important it was to draw people from across a broad social spectrum and crafted his lectures and presentations in a way that would be interesting and relevant to the widest range of people.

"The Louvre and the first Philadelphia museum were pioneers when it came to providing access to art to as many people as possible. Most of the early collections, while open to the public, considered the public to be only those with the sophistication to appreciate what they would be able to view. This struggle, over whether museums should organize and promote themselves only to those who know and appreciate art-- or whether they should welcome, and indeed seek out and make art and programming relevant to everyone, was routine. Fortunately, today museums and universities work hard to cultivate everyone."