

Bob Burdett/
Photography
Museum

—

JEFFREY HOGREFE

Met Woos Howard Gilman But May Lose His Collection

On Oct. 16, the Metropolitan Museum of Art unveiled the Howard Gilman Gallery, the first permanent gallery in the institution devoted to photography. The gallery, a series of three small spaces on the second floor, was paid for by Mr. Gilman, who is one of the leading collectors of photography in the country. In total, the

Gilman Paper Company Collection, as his collection is called, includes more than 5,000 images and spans the first 100 years of photography, from the 1830's to the 1930's. Since it contains many unique, rare and exceptional objects from the early days of photography, it is considered to be indispensable to the study and understanding of the craft. Maria Morris Hambourg, the Met's curator of photography, called it "the finest private collection in the world." And it's a collection the Met has had its eye on for a long time.

But Mr. Gilman, who is known for being exacting in his dealings, has never actually agreed to bequeath his collection to the Met, even though selections from it were first shown at the museum in a 1993 exhibition entitled *The Waking Dream*. In fact, portions of his collection are stored in the Met, and the collection's curator, Pierre Apraxine, is a consultant for the institution. But now it seems that the collection might be slipping away from the Met and going to a new photography museum that is being planned at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

On behalf of Mr. Gilman, Mr. Apraxine confirmed that talks have taken place between himself, Mr. Gilman and I. Michael Heyman, the secretary of the Smithsonian. "They are still in the planning stages," said Mr. Apraxine, "but the idea is interesting." Dennis O'Connor, provost of the Smithsonian, confirmed that talks have been held. "Indeed, there have been mutual expressions of interest on the part of Gilman and [the] Smithsonian," he said, "and we are engaged in conversations exploring that interest."

Sources close to the museum maintain that Ms. Hambourg has been upset by this new wrinkle in her curatorial initiative to woo the Gilman Collection to the Met. "The Met has spent a great deal of money and gone to a great deal of trouble to build the Gilman Gallery, and now they may have to watch while the collection is sold to another institution in another city," said the source.

For her part, Ms. Hambourg took the high road when asked to comment on this latest development. "As far as I am concerned, putting the pictures on the wall and sharing them with the public is a form of a gift," she said. "We don't ever own any art, anyway—you, I or anyone else. We are just stewards. As far as what is going to happen to those pictures down the road, I won't be here to know about it and you won't, either."

Mr. Apraxine, who started his career as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, admitted that the Met took a chance by exhibiting the Gilman

collection before it had received a promise of a gift. "They were very generous to show our collection, a collection which was not committed to them," he said, referring to the 1993 exhibit. "To a certain degree, there is always a danger for a museum to show a collection because the collector might use the museum as a showplace to sell their collection." Taking an all's-fair-in-love-and-war position, he added that he does not think that he and Mr. Gilman owe the Met anything for their generosity. "The only thing that Howard Gilman has always said is that he wishes the collection to stay

together," Mr. Apraxine said.

Mr. Apraxine admitted that he has been contacted by other museums interested in securing the Gilman collection. He would not say who they were, but he did allow that in the 80's the J. Paul Getty Museum in California expressed interest in the collection, which contains one of the earliest nude photographs, an albumen silver print that was produced by Gustave Le Gray in 1855, and a view of the Egyptian pyramid of El-Kumeh in Thebes by Francis Frith, taken in 1857. Mr. Apraxine said that the Getty hasn't contacted him recently. "But you never know," he added. "Maybe there is a letter on the way right now."

TWO ENGLISHMEN FROM GREENWICH

During the coming month, Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses will sell hundreds of millions of dollars worth of art. But for



Going, going: Auctioneers Alasdair Nichol and Richard Madley can't wait to sell this Jackson Pollock drawing on Nov. 11.

those who want to break into the high-priced art auction business, the door is not easy to pass through, as Richard Madley and Paul Roberts have discovered in the 10 months they have been in charge of the New York office of Phillips International Auctioneers & Valuers.

Phillips is an old British auction house, but it has not been able to make its United States outlet compete on the same playing field with its auction house brethren. As part of an effort to change Phillips' image in the United States as an also-ran, Mr. Madley and

Mr. Roberts are bringing a drawing by Jackson Pollock to auction on Nov. 11. It is just a 14-by-11-inch paper drawing from 1948, worth \$80,000 to \$120,000, and signed by the artist's widow in 1972. The drawing contains a number of unmistakable Pollockian squiggles, done in ink, watercolor and graphite. But Mr. Madley and Mr. Roberts, who had to compete with Sotheby's for the consignment, are as proud of it as Christie's probably was to secure the \$100 million-plus Victor and Sally Ganz collection, which will be sold on Nov. 10. The story of their triumph is one of the little guy winning at the end of the day, and why it pays to live in Greenwich, Conn.

The Pollock drawing came to Phillips from Matthew Harrison, a corporate consultant in Manhattan who is a partner in the consulting and management firm of Budetti, Harrison, Nerland and Associates. Mr. Harrison, who lives in Greenwich, read about Mr. Madley and Mr. Roberts in a newsletter that was written by a local real estate agent. It said, according to Mr. Madley, that "two Englishmen who are auctioneers have moved to Greenwich." Both Mr. Madley and Mr. Roberts have homes in the old-line Connecticut suburb. But this was not as easy as members of the trans-Atlantic old boy league shaking hands on the 7.05 to Grand Central. Mr. Harrison was selling the Pollock on behalf of a bankrupt estate that had sought his consulting services. He had to convince the bankruptcy court that he was serving the best interests of the estate's creditors by selling the picture at a lesser-known auction house.

"Nobody wakes up in the morning and says, 'I think I will call Phillips,'" Mr. Madley admitted the other day in the auction house, which consists of a frayed-at-the-edges auditorium and a series of examining rooms in a modern building on East 79th Street. Mr. Madley feels that Phillips won the consignment not because he lives in Greenwich, but because he is willing to go all-out for a drawing that Sotheby's and Christie's would probably include along with a number of similar objects.

To prove that, he started to talk up the drawing, which he was standing next to. First he asked a writer what he thought of it. Then he said what he thought of it. "It is not a typical Pollock, is it?" he queried, offering some information about the famous Pollock drips. Then he gazed at it in awe.

JAMES HAMILTON

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

A Relaxed Tour Through the Early Ephemera

By SARAH BOXER

A blurry photograph of four Nubian children in sunlight is the first picture in the inaugural exhibition of the Howard Gilman Gallery, the Metropolitan Museum's new suite devoted exclusively to photography. Taken in 1852 by Ernest Benecke, this picture shows one boy with his hand playfully resting on another's head, while a third looks on. The fourth boy sits on the ground fiddling with his toes.

Given that the Gilman Paper Company Collection has some 5,000 works, including rare prints by William Henry Fox Talbot, Gustave Le Gray, Julia Margaret Cameron and Nadar, you might wonder why the exhibition begins here. Wouldn't a colossus fit better? Why not one of the many grand pictures that come later in the show: Francis Frith's picture of the fallen 900-ton statue of Ramses II or Mathew Brady's portly Cornelia Van Ness Roosevelt? Or perhaps Timothy O'Sullivan's landscape of columnar feldspar spiking up from a rocky ridge in Nevada?

The intimate, casual, almost modern picture of the boys is, of course, a signal. Four years ago, the public was introduced to the wonders of the Gilman Collection with "The Waking Dream," 253 photographs from the first century of photography collected by the paper company magnate Howard Gilman over a period of 20 years with the guidance of his curator, Pierre Apraxine. It was a grand tour, running from Talbot to Rodchenko.

But now something is different. The Metropolitan Museum has a permanent gallery for photography, which can draw not only from Mr. Gilman's collection but also from its own and others. Suddenly there is all the time in the world. Might as well relax. Play it again, but more slowly and in a new key.

A fitting emblem of the show is Louis-Pierre-Théophile Dubois' de Nehaut's picture of the zoological

garden in Brussels. There is no central focus of interest on the great lawn of the zoo; there aren't even animals. But as the wall text points out, the photograph invites a casual stroll along its periphery, a look at the easy arrangement of chairs, ladder, fence and wheelbarrows.

This exhibition of 55 works, dating from the 1840's to the 1860's, mirrors the uncertain beginnings of photography, when no one knew what it would become, the curators suggest. Photographers, barely able to believe that they could really capture a fleeting moment on paper, glass or metal, were wandering around the world hungrily bagging images. Suddenly, the world was full of ephemera that could be caught: dead crocodiles, grand waterfalls, freed slaves, blind men, nude women. So much to preserve, so little time.

The show — put together by Malcolm Daniel, associate curator of photographs at the Metropolitan, and Mr. Apraxine, with Marla Morris Ham-bourg, the head curator of the museum's photography department — captures the urgency and randomness of early photography.

The surest embodiments of Romantic transience are, of course, children and ruins. Here, Roger Fenton's view of the crumbling altar at Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire hangs near Charles Marville's clear-eyed image of a ruin-in-waiting, a Paris cul-de-sac slated for destruction to make way for Baron Haussmann's redesign of the city.

The exhibition includes some incomparable portraits of children: Cameron has a pouty portrait of a little girl as large as life. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), having deliberately torn the dress of his young model, Xie Kitchin, caught her with a justifiably put-out expres-



Metropolitan Museum of Art

"Blind Man and His Reader," a 19th-century daguerreotype by an unknown photographer, in the Metropolitan's new photography gallery.

sion on her face.

Many of the early photographers could be just as wistful about their own likenesses. Frederick Langenheim caught himself in a daguerreotype looking at Talbotype portraits of himself. (These photographers were nothing if not self-reflective.) And Nadar, hands on hips, presents himself in Indian moccasins, leggings and a Howard Stern-like wig, which now looks like an anachronistic comment on his penchant for self-promotion.

Among the most stunning photographs is one of the few nudes that Le Gray took, a sleepy Odalisque with long curls and crossed feet. Everybody wondered where this picture was, Ms. Ham-bourg said. Wonder no more.

The Gilman Gallery, though small,

feels luxurious, for it is drawing from a pool that is deep and wide enough to yield surprises: cartes de visites from Tom Thumb's wedding and an intimate portrait of a family of freed slaves. But the gallery has more going for it than that. The cases, designed by Daniel Kershaw, can exhibit works that have long bedeviled museums: fragile negatives, light-sensitive prints and especially daguerreotypes.

Because daguerreotypes are captured on polished, light-sensitive silver-plated sheets of copper, they are notorious for reading like mirrors. But here, illuminated by fiber-optic lights, they are clear as can be. The most compelling one in this exhibition is a bizarre portrait of a blind man with cockeyed sunglasses and a cane, accompanied by his not-too-friendly-looking reader who carries The New York Herald.

Despite the gallery's amenities, some of the pictures in the Gilman collection are too fragile even to appear. In this

show there are three images from Talbot's paper negatives: one of a branch of elderberry, one of Lockhartine and one of the library at Lacock Abbey in England. All are represented here by copies, for if the originals were to be exposed to light for any length of time, they would vanish.

It is good to be reminded that medium that is dedicated to fixity is founded on such fugitive images as these.

The new Howard Gilman Gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, at 81st Street, will change exhibitions three times a year. The current show runs through Feb. 1.



GILMAN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT INC

Robert L. Burkett
PresidentMEMORANDUM

Date: March 30, 1998
To: Sidney Blumenthal
From: Bob Burkett BB
Re: Gilman Museum Project

I have taken the liberty of enclosing the initial documents of understanding between Gilman and the Smithsonian as background for this project.

The current position of the Gilman organization is that the idea of a national photography museum is still alive but has not yet reached the front burner for a final decision. One of the executors of the Gilman estate has committed to reaching such a decision before September 1 of this year.

I think it would be advantageous for H. to call Bernard Bergreen and Natalie Moody at 212-246-3300 to express continuing interest and encouragement in what could be a cornerstone project for the millenium. She need not endorse but she should certainly express both her own and the P.'s enthusiasm for the project. Please note that the call should be made between the hours of 2:00 and 5:30pm and before May 19 after which Bernard Bergreen will not be available.

If you have any further questions, please call me at the same number.

APR. -09' 98 (THU) 16:22

TEL:2122624108

P. 003

March 12, 1997

DETERMINED TO BE AN
ADMINISTRATIVE MARKINGINITIALS: PLP DATE: 02/01/13
2013-0124-5

Mr. I. Michael Heyman
Secretary
Smithsonian Institution-SI 205/MRC 016
1000 Jefferson Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20560

*** Personal & Confidential ***

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I enjoyed our meeting of March 11. I have related our discussion to Howard Gilman who continues in his enthusiasm and who expressed interest in knowing more about how we may proceed. This letter is to confirm the main details of the situation as it stands and to briefly summarize our understanding of the possibilities of future collaboration.

Over many years, Howard Gilman has accumulated a collection of vintage photographs considered by many to be the most important collection of its kind in the world. It's value has been estimated at over \$100 million and it has received major exhibitions at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Washington's National Gallery.

During recent months we have learned of efforts to renovate and revitalize downtown Washington DC. In particular, it has come to our attention that the now-vacant National Tariff Building might be available for use as a museum. We are seriously considering an arrangement whereby, working with the appropriate authorized government agencies, we would transform the Tariff Building into a museum that would house Howard Gilman's photography collection and bear his name in perpetuity.

APR. -09' 98 (THU) 16:23

TEL: 2122624108

P. 004

Mr. Heyman
March 12, 1997

Page 2.

Under these conditions a National Museum of Photography would be established in the National Tariff Building with the intention of eventually being absorbed by the Smithsonian and assuming status as one of its institutions. The Gilman Collection, the cornerstone of the museum, would act as a magnet for other major collections throughout the United States and the world. The museum itself would also serve as a repository for the various Smithsonian photography collections with the purpose of archiving, restoring, and storing the precious inventories that now lie unseen, uncelebrated and in less than ideal conditions. In addition to permanently housing and showcasing the Gilman Collection, the museum would regularly exhibit curated portions of current collections from each of the Smithsonian museums.

It is understood that the expenses associated with the restoration of the Tariff Building would be undertaken under the auspices of the Gilman organization in conjunction with a major, national capital campaign.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Robert L. Burkett
President

RLB/hb



GILMAN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT INC.

Robert L. Burkett
President

March 12, 1997

Mr. I. Michael Heyman
Secretary
Smithsonian Institution-SI 205/MRC 016
1000 Jefferson Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20560

DETERMINED TO BE AN
ADMINISTRATIVE MARKING
INITIALS: RLB DATE: 02/01/13
2013-0124-S

*** Personal & Confidential ***

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I enjoyed our meeting of March 11. I have related our discussion to Howard Gilman who continues in his enthusiasm and who expressed interest in knowing more about how we may proceed. This letter is to confirm the main details of the situation as it stands and to briefly summarize our understanding of the possibilities of future collaboration.

Over many years, Howard Gilman has accumulated a collection of vintage photographs considered by many to be the most important collection of its kind in the world. It's value has been estimated at over \$100 million and it has received major exhibitions at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Washington's National Gallery.

During recent months we have learned of efforts to renovate and revitalize downtown Washington DC. In particular, it has come to our attention that the now-vacant National Tariff Building might be available for use as a museum. We are seriously considering an arrangement whereby, working with the appropriate authorized government agencies, we would transform the Tariff Building into a museum that would house Howard Gilman's photography collection and bear his name in perpetuity.

Mr. Heyman
March 12, 1997

Page 2.

Under these conditions a National Museum of Photography would be established in the National Tariff Building with the intention of eventually being absorbed by the Smithsonian and assuming status as one of its institutions. The Gilman Collection, the cornerstone of the museum, would act as a magnet for other major collections throughout the United States and the world. The museum itself would also serve as a repository for the various Smithsonian photography collections with the purpose of archiving, restoring, and storing the precious inventories that now lie unseen, uncelebrated and in less than ideal conditions. In addition to permanently housing and showcasing the Gilman Collection, the museum would regularly exhibit curated portions of current collections from each of the Smithsonian museums.

It is understood that the expenses associated with the restoration of the Tariff Building would be undertaken under the auspices of the Gilman organization in conjunction with a major, national capital campaign.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. L. Burkett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert L. Burkett
President

RLB/hb