



## **ENSEMBLE: ALBERT C. BARNES AND THE EXPERIMENT IN EDUCATION**

*Ensemble: Albert C. Barnes and the Experiment in Education* is an exhibition focusing on the history of the Barnes Foundation and the life and legacy of its founder. Albert Barnes is an archetypal American success story. Through sheer ambition and determination, he rose from the hardscrabble Philadelphia neighborhoods of his youth to a brilliant career in pharmaceuticals. A self-made millionaire by the age of 35, he devoted his fortune to art and education, emerging as one of the most ambitious and progressive collectors of his generation.

The exhibition tells Barnes's story through a rich assortment of rarely-seen historical photographs, personal letters, manuscripts, books, and press clippings culled mainly from the Foundation's Archives. The material traces Dr. Barnes's remarkable endeavor to enrich the lives of the "common man" through the appreciation of art—an "experiment in education," as he called it, that began in his factory and that culminated in the establishment of the Barnes Foundation in 1922. The exhibition also brings to life Barnes the person, revealing him as a complicated figure who could be fiercely competitive and pugnacious, but also humorous, generous and kind.

*Ensemble* is organized chronologically around several major themes. The show begins with a look at Barnes's early life, presenting personal items such as his wedding album and his alumni association certificate from Philadelphia's Central High. It explores his studies in chemistry, focusing especially on the invention and production of Argyrol—the silver-nitrate compound from which he made his fortune—and describes the seminars he developed for his factory workers on the subjects of art, aesthetics, and philosophy. Among the items featured are written exams from these courses.

Another section charts the explosive growth of Barnes's art collection, touching on his strategies as a buyer, the aesthetic criteria guiding his selections, and important early influences on his thinking; crowded invoices demonstrate the intensity of his activity, while newspaper clippings from the time reveal him as a collector who continually pushed against the grain. The motivations leading up to Barnes's 1922 establishment of the Barnes Foundation are explored in a section that includes, among other things, fascinating correspondence with John Dewey, the American philosopher whose ideas about democracy and education were so central to Barnes's thinking. Photographs, book manuscripts, music programs, and lecture notes from the 1920s, 30s and 40s reveal the Barnes Foundation as a hub of activity centered on an increasingly storied art collection.

The exhibition's title comes from the distinctive arrangements of the art in Barnes's collection galleries. These arrangements—which Barnes called his "ensembles"—challenge conventional museum display practices by mixing together works from different cultures, time periods, and media; African sculpture, modern paintings, furniture, metal works, and Native American pottery are all presented side-by-side. The show's core section is devoted to an exploration of these ensembles, illuminating these dense groupings as a direct expression of Barnes's pedagogical beliefs and thus making them more comprehensible for contemporary viewers. The title "Ensemble" also invokes the circle of friends, employees, and interlocutors who helped to shape the Foundation's mission and activities.

*Ensemble: Albert C. Barnes and the Experiment in Education* is curated by Judith Dolkart, Martha Lucy, and Katy Rawdon. Altogether, the exhibition presents approximately 300 items from the Barnes Foundations Archives as well as a selection of works of art from storage. It also includes several loans from other collections, including the Brooklyn Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Violette de Mazia Foundation, and a private collection in Europe. The exhibition will run from May 19, 2012 to March 18, 2013.

The Inaugural Special Exhibition is sponsored by Morgan Stanley Smith Barney. Additional support is provided by the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Exhibition Fund.