

OPINION Loose Canon

## Has Barnes' Vision Finally Been Realized?

The synergy of art and incarceration.

by Bruce Schimmel

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My friend Albo Jeavons is a gentle soul who's cursed with savage visions. His satiric 2002 "Disney Hole" proposed building a Museum of Corporate Welfare — called MOCOW ([www.disneyhole.org](http://www.disneyhole.org)) — to fill an abandoned entertainment-complex site at Eighth and Market streets. Topping MOCOW would have been a giant sculpture of a couple of corporate types in business suits, on their knees, with one man's head deeply embedded in another man's butt.

Today, Albo is taking aim at a new boondoggle with "ArtJail," a send-up of the proposed Barnes Museum on the Parkway ([www.artjail.org](http://www.artjail.org)). Grabbing an idea I tossed out in a January 2005 column (to which he's most welcome), Albo proposes *combining* an existing youth detention center with the new museum to produce "The Fine Art of Punishment®."

Borrowing the language of bureaucracy, Albo says that the synergy of art and incarceration could spin-off several cash streams. Among its amenities, the new prison/museum will offer skybox condos and its corridors will be lined with casino-style "Art Slots." The ArtJail's children's holding facility will be the first in a chain of for-profit youth-detention centers called My First Prison®.

Of course, the new building will also be green, featuring a roof garden that young inmates will farm to provide fresh produce for the museum's New Plantation Cafe®. A line of Barnes-branded arts and crafts — some made by the young inmates — will be marketed through a new cable network. Items like "ArtJail" skateboards and dinner plates imprinted with Picasso drawings will be sold from a huge TV set built into the building's exterior.



DELACROIX FOR DELINQUENTS:  
Albo Jeavons modestly proposes combining the current Youth Study Center with the proposed Barnes Museum.

(CLICK IMAGE FOR LARGER  
VERSION)

What's funnier, and weirder, is that ArtJail is eerily consistent with Albert Barnes' own vision. In his will, the eccentric millionaire insisted that his art collection of Van Goghs, Cezannes and other masters would be used primarily to educate and uplift underprivileged children. (Of course, Barnes never contemplated also having the kids on display.) Barnes also demanded that his collection should never leave in his mansion in Merion. Which brings up the most shameful aspect of the Barnes' debacle.

Gov. Ed Rendell, with help from Pew, Lenfest and Annenberg charities, has been twisting arms to relocate the \$6 billion collection to the Parkway. And though a recent *Inquirer* editorial applauds the move, outside of Philly, the new museum has been almost universally condemned.

As *Los Angeles Times* art critic Christopher Knight put it recently, the "scheme wrecks the greatest American cultural monument of the early 20th century." It is, writes Knight, "a hostile takeover, powered by privilege, manned by bureaucrats and operating below the public radar."

In recent court papers, these power brokers have been accused of misleading Judge Stanley Ott into wrongfully breaking Barnes' will. Ott is now rethinking his decision, which is due out soon.

So with any luck, these art thieves' scheme will be foiled, and Barnes' collection will stay in Merion. But Albo's ArtJail will live on as another savage fantasy about another idiot idea, about which we can all have a good laugh.

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