

The Barnes Foundation and Education

by Jay Raymond

“Politics, mere prestige, and the activities of those who have wealth without intelligence or discrimination, or good intentions without discernment, are largely in control in existing institutions and academies, and their hand is fatal to any real aesthetic cultivation.” Albert C. Barnes

It is my contention that those in favor of moving the art cannot understand what sort of education Dr. Barnes nurtured and intended, for if they did, this plan to move the art would make them weep, as I do when I contemplate what will be lost.

Dr. Barnes was a serious student and close friend of John Dewey, the foremost philosopher of education this country has produced and who was the Barnes Foundation’s first Director of Education. The ideas the Barnes Foundation is designed to teach are directly rooted in Dewey’s philosophy. Among these ideas is that education and experience are one and the same. Barnes considered “experience” to be the sum of all the parts of what a human being senses and makes sense of, be it a work of art, a walk down a street, or raising a child. For there to be profound experience, the mind of the person has to be fully applied. Without the sustained effort of the human mind, an experience does not reach the depths that it might otherwise. In other words, a subject not contemplated, studied and compared to other similar subjects is a lost opportunity for learning and growth. Real learning takes time and devotion.

The galleries at the Barnes Foundation were designed to offer a specific opportunity for those interested to study, in a sustained manner, the meaning of visual expression in all cultures and times. The arrangements on the walls are designed for just that sort of investigation. The design of everything one encounters at the Barnes Foundation is intended to foster that sort of

investigation: the quiet, green setting; the arrangements of the trees, shrubs, gardens and lawns surrounding the galleries; the exterior of the gallery building; the arrangement of the gallery rooms themselves, moving deeper and deeper into the details of it all. At the Barnes Foundation, in its indivisible form in Merion, anyone can investigate for a lifetime the interplay of the nature arranged by humans and the art created by humans and arranged by Dr. Barnes, and through that investigation experience the greatest depths of the qualities of being human.

Artists concentrate life. At the Barnes Foundation the concentration is sublime. The Barnes Foundation is a resource so vast, a creation so rich, that it is one of the paramount creations of humankind because it sums the work of a great diversity of humankind. Dr. Barnes' creation, his work of art, rests in a setting that is its perfect complement. It is a treasure that no one has yet fully measured. And yet, we have well-intended politicians, enabled by billionaires and the silence of the local art establishment, seeing no harm in moving the art, thereby defacing this monumental contribution to humankind's investigation into itself. This would be a great crime, but a crime that has not yet been committed. I am one among many who are working to prevent it.

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Mr. Raymond has studied for many years at the Barnes Foundation Art Department, beginning in 1975 when he was an undergraduate at Temple University. He has also taught a course for first year students at the Barnes. He is a member of Friends of the Barnes Foundation (<http://www.barnesfriends.org>).

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