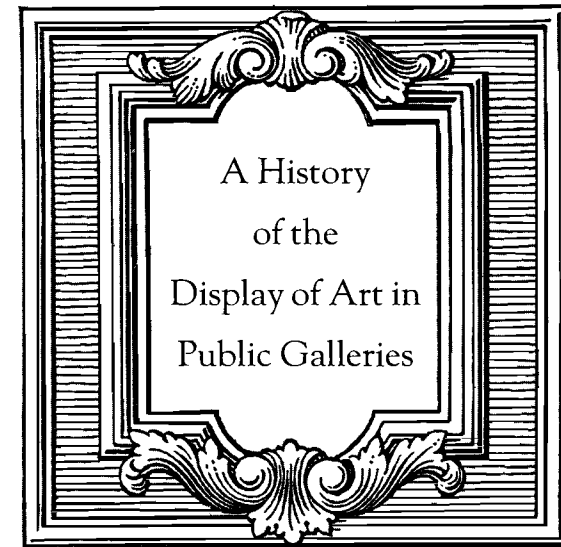


DAVID CARRIER

MUSEUM SKEPTICISM



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will suggest how to develop a proper philosophical argument. To fully understand how we can identify the changes produced when paintings are moved, what is required is not just a bare, ahistorical analysis, but close study of the history of the public art museum. That is the task for the remainder of this book. Chapter 5 discusses the general structure of art museums, and then the remainder of the book presents a sequence of case studies.

5

Art Museum Narratives

Nothing about museums is as splendid as their entrances—the sudden vault, the shapely cornices, the motionless uniformed guard like a wittily disguised archangel, the broad stairs leading upward into heaven knows what mansions of expectantly hushed treasure.

—JOHN UPDIKE

A museum based upon Vasari's *Lives* would start with Cimabue and Giotto and end with Michelangelo and Titian, focusing on the High Renaissance, with a small annex devoted to Flemish art. After Vasari's time, the list of canonical figures expanded. In 1841, for example, Paul Delaroche's mural for the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, included Correggio, Veronese, Antonello da Messina, Andrew del Sarto, Michelangelo, Titian, and others of Vasari's heroes, but also such later artists as Caravaggio, Claude Lorrain, Murillo, Paul Potter, Rembrandt, Rubens, Ruisdael, Terborch, Van der Helse, Velázquez, and Gaspard and Nicolas Poussin.¹ And nowadays many museums add non-European art.

Imagine that thanks to a time travel machine Giorgio Vasari is able to visit our museums. In the galleries devoted to older European art, he finds familiar paintings by Giotto, Mantegna, Raphael, Leonardo, and himself. But the arrangement of these rooms surprises him. His *Lives* has a historical perspective. As Barolsky describes Vasari's organization, "All artists are defined as either coming before Giotto and thus lacking his virtue or following him as 'disciples' and thus absorbing it."² But Vasari hardly expected that much of the art he describes would be removed from churches or palaces and exhibited in museums. Personal collections are usually displayed in aesthetic hangings. In my home, for example, an abstract painting by Emilio Vedova is next to a print by Alphonse Legros, and a nineteenth-century Chinese scroll hangs alongside a Jacques Callot

engraving. Like such private displays, the older public hangings typically were designed to be aesthetically pleasing. Johann Zoffany's *The Tribuna of the Uffizi* (1777-78), for example, shows a variety of antique sculpture, and a very dense hanging of paintings by Pietro da Cortona, Guido, Holbein, Michelangelo, Raphael, Guido Reni, Rubens, Titian, and other artists.³ By contrast, most public museums employ historical hangings.

Were a loan exhibition to present Manet's *Olympia* (1863), Mi Yu-jen's *Cloudy Mountains* (1140s), and Sean Scully's *A Bedroom in Venice* (1988), paintings from the Musée d'Orsay, the Metropolitan, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, we would expect some explanation of how these seeming disparate works of art are connected. You might enjoy these masterpieces without seeking to relate them. But when seeing them in one gallery, it would surely be natural to seek visual connections. Knowing that cloudy mountains were for Mi Yu-jen "an auspicious symbol relating to the concept of good government" and that Scully's title, alluding to a Turner, shows ideal harmony, suggests how to construct a unifying narrative.⁴ All three painters are political artists. But here we return to the essential tension that has motivated our discussion of museum skepticism. In a museum, you may focus on one work of art in visual isolation without looking at nearby paintings. But when you do look around, then it is natural to relate that one picture to others. Museum narratives thus need to be accompanied by what we have called, following Wollheim, an "envelope," some "theory of art" explaining the visual connection of these objects.

Michel Foucault described his amusement at Borges's fable describing a Chinese encyclopedia dividing animals into those "(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that 'from a long way off look like flies.'"⁵ Imagine art museums organized in equally eccentric ways displaying paintings according to size, from smallest to largest; according to color, grouping Chinese, Indian, and Italian pictures with red together; or according to birthdate of the curator responsible for acquisition. An effective installation inspires us to see connections between art on display. By contrast, these imaginary classifications do not suggest any

interesting visual principles of ordering. Museum hangings based upon such classifications are unlikely to be employed.

The easiest way to make the case for museum skepticism is to observe that modern installations dramatically change how we view individual older paintings. By presenting works of art in a historical perspective, museums dramatically transform our visual thinking. "Meaningful juxtapositions can be made as part of the museum's program," Sherman Lee points out.⁶ But then there is an obvious conflict between focusing on individual works of art valued for their own qualities and as items in a historical survey. Wollheim writes, "It has been, over the centuries . . . within the tradition of the West, a natural concern of the artist to aid our concentration upon a particular object by making the object the unique possessor of certain general qualities."⁷ When paintings are set in a historical narrative, as illustrations of the development from the quattrocento through to the baroque and the rococo, then to some degree we treat them as examples of period styles. "In the Western tradition," Ernst Gombrich writes, "painting has indeed been pursued as a science."⁸ In the Uffizi, for example, you walk from the Cimabue and Giotto, to the Uccello, and on to the Raphaels, Titians, and the Caravaggio seeing a story of progress. And the same story is told with different paintings in the state museums at Berlin, Florence, London, Paris, Stockholm, and Vienna.

Nowadays churches containing masterpieces function as museums. But when art tourists at Assisi discuss the frescoes in loud voices, the Franciscans remind them that they are in a place of worship, not a museum. Giulio Lorenzetti's *Venice and Its Lagoon* devotes thirteen pages to S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, telling the story of the building, façade, and interior, and walking the visitor to the many paintings and sculptures by the various altars. That church has become like a museum. On the high altar, for example, is Titian's *Assumption* (fig. 13), described by Lorenzetti:

With this work, superb for its daring conception and dimensions, for its vibrant colouring, its rhythmical balance of masses and lines, Titian has reached one of the highest expressions of that heroic, ideal transfiguration of classical rhythm, which he too sometimes drew his inspiration from.

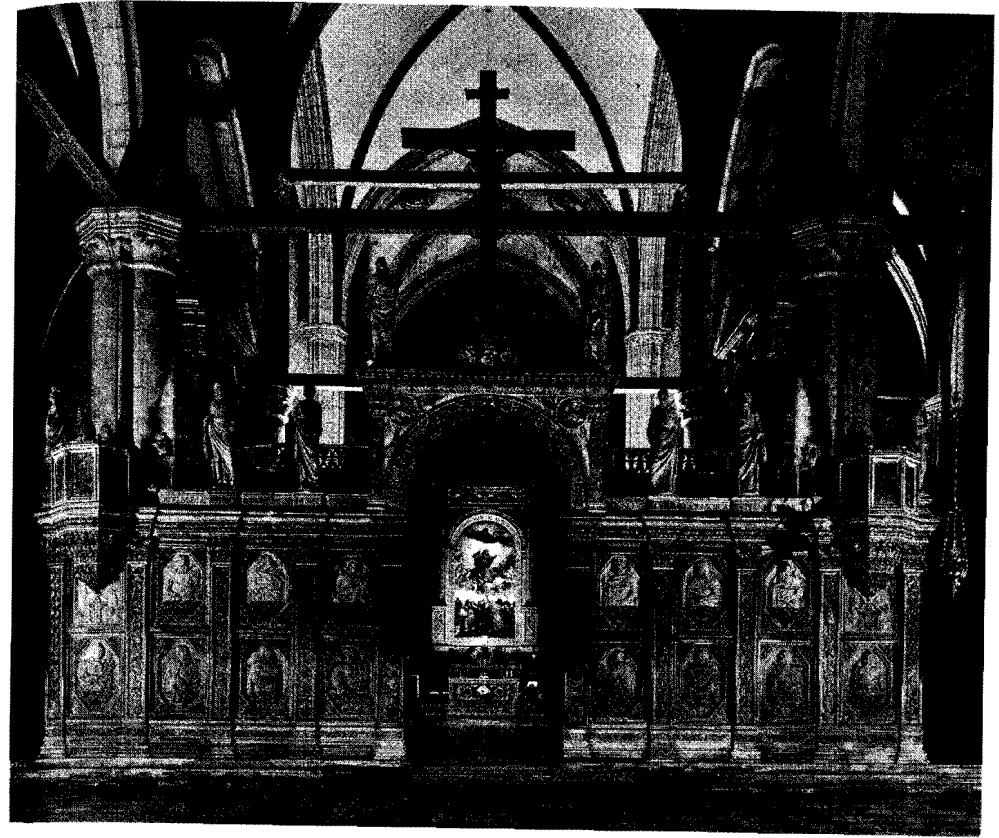
WALL TO THE R.: on a sham-leather fresco background . . . appears the splendid mass. of the MONUM. TO DOGE FRANCESCO FORCARI. . . .

WALL TO THE L.: against a red drapery fresco . . . the MONUM. TO DOGE NICOLO TRON.⁹

But there is no historical narrative in this display. Art in churches usually remains in its original setting. Typical museums, by contrast, change hangings regularly. As Kirk Varnedoe has said, "Because we believe that there's a story to be told doesn't mean we believe that there's one story graven in stone that one will always understand."¹⁰

Literary critics discuss the ways in which our experience of literature and history are informed by the literary structures of this writing. Just as words form sentences whose sense and reference depend on their components, so too visual works of art set together have meanings that they do not possess in isolation. As Mieke Bal puts it, comparing a museum installation to a statement, "the utterance consists not of words or images alone, nor of the frame or frame-up of the installation, but of the productive tension between images, caption (words), and installation (sequence, height, light, combinations)."¹¹ We may attempt to restrict ourselves to what Clement Greenberg called tunnel vision, focusing on one painting, occulting our observation of the art surrounding it.¹² Doing that is valuable, sometimes even necessary. But Bal identifies our more typical experience when she asks, "What happens . . . when one painting, in a particular museum room, ends up next to another, so that you see the one out of the corner of your eye while looking at the other?"¹³ What happens, of course, is that you see the grouping of paintings as defining an implied narrative sequence.

Alternate displays then project different interpretations. In the 1960s, installed at the entrance to the second floor galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Guernica* told an episode in the history of modernism, leading you toward Abstract Expressionist art. Today in the Reina Sofia, the Madrid museum of modern art, a short distance from the Prado, where Goya's *The Third of May* is on display, *Guernica* is part of another story. Sometimes a contrast is made between neutral settings, which show art as it really is and hangings projecting interpretations by description. The National Gallery, London, juxtaposes a sacred scene, altarpiece, and a portrait by Giovanni Bellini and Cima da Conegliano. "As a visitor," Nicolas Serota argues, "one is conscious that grouping in this way places a curatorial *interpretation* on the works, establishing re-



13. The marble iconostasis, through the arch the high altar with Titian's *Assumption*, fifteenth century. S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.
Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, N.Y.

relationships that could not have existed in the minds of the makers of these objects.”¹⁴ His claim is unconvincing. Since they are near contemporaries, probably these relationships were apparent to these Venetian artists themselves. The curator’s aim, Serota adds, “must be to generate a condition in which visitors can experience a sense of discovery in looking at particular paintings . . . in a particular room at a particular moment, rather than finding themselves standing on the conveyer belt of history.” But once paintings are in a museum, how can we avoid experiencing them in a historical sequence? Just as there is no neutral way of describing art just as it really is, so no hanging does not project some interpretation.

Ovid tells Tereus’s story. Hungry, he ate food provided by his wife Procne, not knowing that she, avenging his rape of her sister Philomela, was feeding him the body of their son Itys. We can describe such tragic situations by use of narrative sentences, sentences which “refer to at least two time-separated events though they only *describe* (are only *about*) the earliest event to which they refer.”¹⁵ Narrative sentences provide true descriptions of events that are unknown to the participants, identifying the ultimate consequences of actions that are as yet unknown when they act. Tragedy, Danto adds, “is often generated by the fact that agents lack a piece of knowledge the *author* of a tragedy . . . will disclose to the audience, whose feelings are engaged by the realization that they know something the character does not.” The food that seemed tasty to Tereus became repulsive as soon as the vengeful Procne identified its source.

“In 1869, the greatest twentieth-century French painter was born”: nobody knew that until 1906, when Henri Matisse’s importance became obvious. Describing one moment of history in terms known only at some later point, narrative sentences are the spine of history writing.¹⁶ T. J. Clark says that Jacques-Louis David’s *Death of Marat* (1793) marks the origin of modernism. “My candidate for the beginning of modernism—which at least has the merit of being obviously far-fetched—is 25 Vendémiaire Year 2 (16 October 1793, it came to be known). That was the day a hastily completed painting by Jacques-Louis David, of Marat . . . was released into the public realm.”¹⁷ Here we find another narrative sentence. In 1793 it was too early to be aware that modernism was beginning. Michael Fried offers yet another narrative sentence when he writes: “In a series of remarkable paintings made by staining thinned-down black paint into unsized canvas in 1951, Pollock seems to have been on the verge

of an entirely new and different kind of painting. . . . The man who . . . explored and developed the new synthesis of figuration and opticality sketched out in Pollock’s stain paintings of 1951 was Morris Louis.”¹⁸ “In 1951, Pollock anticipated Morris Louis’s stain paintings”: in 1951, no one could have seen that. And Gombrich employs a narrative sentence when he places Constable’s *Wivenhoe Park* in the history of landscape painting. A generation earlier, he writes, Gainsborough declined a similar commission, finding “the mere imitation of a real view unworthy of the artist who is concerned with the children of his brain, the language of the imagination.”¹⁹ “Gainsborough inaugurated the tradition of English landscape painting”: that statement could not have been understood in Gainsborough’s era. Narrative sentences identify causal connections. Historians write narrative sentences, making their proposed causal connections explicit. And museums make such connections implicit in their hangings. An imaginative curator could illustrate Clark’s commentary by presenting *Death of Marat* as the first painting in a history of modernism. And an exhibition called “Constable’s Sources” could include a Gainsborough.

In the old-fashioned hangings of the Wallace Collection, London, or the Musée Condé, Chantilly, the Poussins are near paintings by other earlier or later artists from outside France. These museums do not employ historical hangings. In the Metropolitan Museum, by contrast, the Poussins are next to the pictures by Claude Lorrain and Sebastian Bourdon, other Frenchmen who worked in Rome during the seventeenth century. And at the Louvre, Poussin is set in the history of French art. But Poussin did not paint for such settings. On July 25, 1665, during the visit to Paris on which Bernini presented his unsuccessful proposal for a new Louvre, he visited Paul Fréart de Chantelou. That collector owned eleven Poussins, including the second version of the *Seven Sacraments*. When Bernini entered the room, only *Confirmation* was uncovered. The pictures were unveiled and moved near to the window. He said that *Extreme Unction* was like “a great sermon, to which one listens with the deepest attention and goes away in silence while enjoying the inner experience.” Bernini studied these pictures for an hour, looking at *Baptism* “for a long while sitting, and then again . . . on his knees, changing his position from time to time in order to see it better.”²⁰

Like Piero’s *The Baptism of Christ*, *Seven Sacraments* have moved re-

peatedly. Put on the art market during the French Revolution, in 1798 they were acquired by the Duke of Bridgewater, whose descendants have loaned them to the National Gallery of Scotland. When I first saw them in Edinburgh around 1990, they were in a haphazard hanging. Then at the Poussin retrospective in Paris, 1994, *Seven Sacraments* illustrated his stylistic development. Now in Scotland they are alone in a small gallery with floor tiles imitating those depicted in the paintings with a bench like that in the paintings. Few viewers devote as much attention to the individual pictures as Bernini did—and no one normally sees them one by one. In the present dramatic presentation with the floor in the represented scene extended into the gallery, they function as installation art. Although they were not intended to be installed in that way, showing Poussin's paintings in this sequence is a useful way to identify their distinctive features.²¹

Philip Fisher notes the important analogy between viewing sequences of works of art and reading art history: "That we walk through a museum, walk past the art, recapitulates in our act the motion of art history itself, its restlessness, its forward motion, its power to link. . . . In so far as the museum becomes pure path, abandoning the dense spatial rooms of what were once *homes*, or, of course, the highly sophisticated space of a cathedral, it becomes a more perfect image of history."²² Earlier I made a similar, but less general claim: "In the 1970s . . . the very layout of the Museum of Modern Art, which took me from Cézanne and Monet through cubism to abstract expressionism, illustrated *Art and Culture*. . . . The 1984 redesign of the museum reflects a changed estimate of Greenberg."²³ A walk in an art museum is a historical narrative under another name, for you need but describe what you see as you walk to write a history. And just as you may momentarily put down a book between chapters, so too in museums a resting point is desirable. Stepping out of the narrative in the galleries, you momentarily stop before continuing your historical march. Alexander Sokurov's exhilarating film *Russian Ark*, a continuous visual narrative set in the Hermitage, illustrates this experience.

The museum's derivation from the Renaissance palace may influence hangings. Rosalind Krauss notes, "One proceeds in such a building from space to space along a processional path that ties each of these spaces together, a sort of narrative trajectory with each room the place of a sepa-

rate chapter, but all of them articulating the unfolding of the master plot."²⁴ Whatever the plausibility of this historical analysis, the analogy between walking through a museum and reading art history is very suggestive. In museums, as in books, individual works of art are presented in a narrative. Ivan Gaskell speaks of "how meaning might be generated by the juxtaposition of" works of art. "No object," he rightly notes, "is perceived in isolation and that how any given object is perceived is vitally affected by its juxtaposition to other objects is a truism of curatorial practice."²⁵ But of course not all hangings are successful interpretations. At the Louvre in fall 2000 you had to walk through the gallery of Spanish paintings to get to the rooms containing ethnographic art. And in fall 2001, the uptown Guggenheim in New York devoted the main gallery to art from Brazil, with Norman Rockwell's paintings in a side gallery. Just as an ill-ordered book is frustrating, so too a museum with poor transitions is fatiguing.

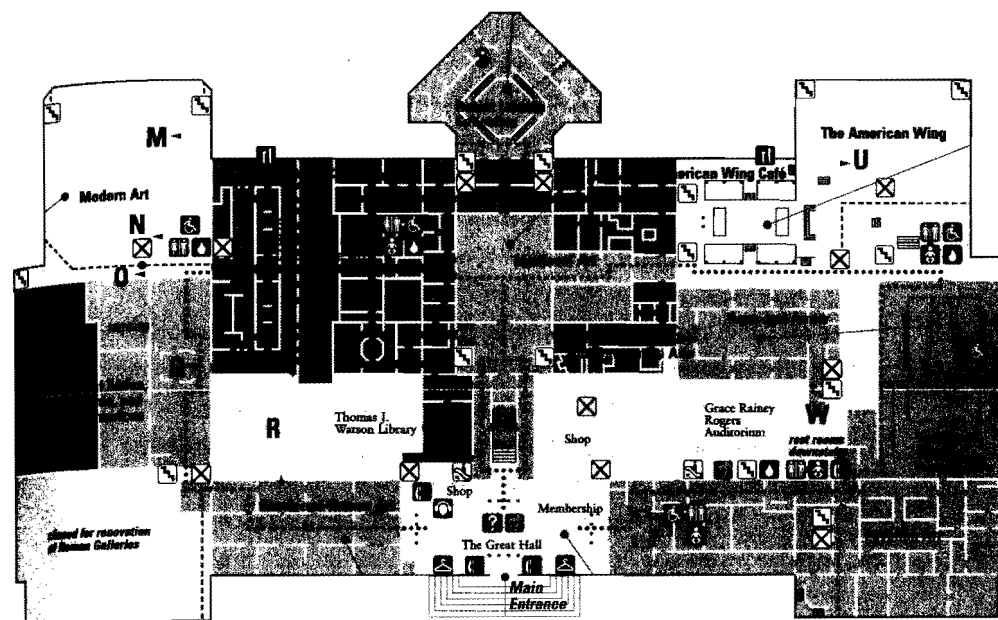
Before the late eighteenth century, museums intermingled artifacts found today in natural history museums—wondrous stones, fossils, stuffed animals, and art from cultures without writing—with works of art.²⁶ Indeed, in some museums built in the nineteenth century, the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh or the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum for example, one large building still contains both paintings and stuffed animals. On the first floor of the Carnegie, you walk past the small gallery near the entrance, enter the hall of sculpture with plaster casts, and then see the minerals, gems, and fossils. In Glasgow you look down from the old fashioned close hanging of paintings to view armor and firearms. By contrast, Denon displayed painting and sculpture according to national schools, separating art from the objects associated with natural history museums.²⁷ Hegel described that practice, saying that he wanted the museum to show not only the external history "but the essential progress of the inner history of painting. It is only such a living spectacle that can give us an idea of painting's beginning . . . of its becoming more living . . . of the progress to dramatically moved action and grouping."²⁸ Most large public museums follow this basic model.

Just as the acknowledgments of a book set its tone, so a museum entrance readies you to view the collection. "There is nothing more discouraging to the would-be museum visitor," an older commentary claims, "than to arrive inside the door and find himself confronted by a seemingly

interminable flight of stairs which must be mounted before he attains his object."²⁹ On the contrary, since museums originally were homes of the muses it is appropriate that upon entering you walk up stairs, as if going into an antique temple or a church. What better place to learn the history of the institution that you are entering? Detached from any utilitarian function, in museums, art is set outside the everyday world. At the entrance you usually find a free floor plan, which maps the displays, restrooms, café, and shop (fig. 14). These little charts deserve serious attention, for they tell much about these institutions.³⁰ A museum ought to have a transparently clear floor plan, making it easy to return to a work of art.³¹

In Boston, Minneapolis, and Cleveland, the original entrances are replaced by side doors opening into the modern wings, arrangements well suited to contemporary art, which is more informal than old master painting. Tadao Ando's Pulitzer Foundation, St. Louis, and its neighbor, the Contemporary Art Museum designed by Brad Cloepfil, have ground floor entrances, encouraging visitors to feel that they are immediately accessible. At most older institutions you ascend stairs to enter. You come into the Prado, the National Galleries in London and Washington, D.C., and the Altes Museum, Berlin by stairs outside the building. Reversing this well-entrenched convention, some museums ask you to descend. I. M. Pei's main entrance to the Louvre takes you down through the grand pyramid and then underground across the courtyard, to come up in one of the three sections named after figures associated with the building: Richelieu, Sully, Denon. And you enter the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, through a courtyard, going down stairs. When you are in the galleries, the artificial lighting and absence of windows remind you that you are underground, a perverse arrangement in a city famous for its sunlight.

Once you enter a museum, then usually you choose what narrative to follow. The uptown Guggenheim Museum in New York is a spiral, but even there you can either walk up or to take the elevator directly to the top and come down. Shelley Errington argues that the linear structure makes it "difficult to organize, display, and therefore for the viewer to conceptualize the history of art as anything other than an illustration of conventional art history's enabling assumption, which is more or less 'one piece of art influences another.'"³² And in the Sheldon Memorial



14. Screen shot from the "Visitor Information" section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Web site, specifically, ground floor plan at http://www.metmuseum.org/visitor/vi_fl_ground_english.htm.

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Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska, Henry Hitchcock explains, "the visitor is offered a single path—or, at least, not more than one choice of path—in moving through . . . (the galleries), while, on the other hand, any one of them can be cut out from the circulation for rehanging without making the other galleries unapproachable."³³ But most museums offer multiple paths. Typical American art institutions have an original older building, usually in a classical architectural style, joined to a more recent addition. Some have rational plans, but most have grown by accretion. Only a very few—the Museum of Modern Art, New York, is the most important example—are rich enough to rebuild completely when remodeling.

Many visitors to the Metropolitan Museum go straight up the main stairs to look at European art. But if you begin in the galleries of Asian art, European painting then looks different. At the main entrance, you

go left to view the Greek sculptures and vases or up the grand stairway to the old master European art, the historical core of the collection. Going to the left, you walk through a gallery devoted to prints to arrive at the Islamic wing. On the far side, you enter the large new wing devoted to modernist and contemporary art. And going down the stairs, you reach the rooms devoted to the arts of Africa and Oceania. But if you go right at the entrance and take the elevator down to the basement, then you enter the new galleries presenting fashion. In the Frick Collection, New York, you can turn to the left to head directly to the Fragonards, or walk through the courtyard to the long room containing *The Polish Rider*, continuing on to the Piero della Francesca *Crucifixion*. If you first look at the early Renaissance religious paintings, Frick's sensual Fragonards may look different. In the Louvre's Grand Gallery, walking west takes you to the later art. And the basic arrangement of the Prado also is chronological, with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painting (and sculpture) on the ground floor; seventeenth- and some eighteenth-century painting on the second floor, and eighteenth-century painting on the top floor.

Museum skeptics correctly identify ways in which moving old art into museums can involve changes for the worse. But often placing art in museums improves how it is seen. And once we are familiar with a hanging, we tend to resist change. "Many pictures have now hung for far longer in museums than in the churches or the palaces for which they were originally designed. Their new associations cluster around them as evocatively as their old ones. . . . Bizarre juxtapositions which would have astounded earlier patrons and collectors can acquire a new validity of their own."³⁴ In Venice many paintings in the Accademia come from churches. Bringing together paintings originally set some distance apart makes it easier to compare these Bellinis, Titians, and Giorgiones. And of course museums make it natural to do wider-ranging visual comparisons. In Cleveland, a short promenade takes you from the Chinese scrolls to landscapes by Claude and Poussin, encouraging reflection on the differences between European and Chinese ways of representing nature.

Everyone who visits museums is aware how they are organized, but because this information I present has not been formally analyzed, spelling it out is important. As yet there exists neither a systematic collection of museum floor plans nor a general history of museum hangings.³⁵ Mary

Anne Staniszewski points out that art historians "have rarely addressed the fact that a work of art, when publicly displayed, almost never stands alone: it is always an element within a permanent or temporary exhibition created in accordance with historically determined and self-consciously staged installation conventions."³⁶ They have not taken much interest in the history of hanging arrangements.³⁷ "From Courbet on, conventions of hanging are an unrecovered history," Brian O'Doherty notes.³⁸ That is unfortunate, for very often knowing a work's display helps us understand visual art. As Andreas Beyer writes, "There is no doubt that the sequence of works of art, their distribution, their hanging or positioning, even their illumination and wall color—in short, the manner of their display—are the essential preconditions to enable them to express something."³⁹ But because of the division of labor between curators and historians, only rarely is such information discussed.

Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* explains how urban dwellers orient themselves: "People tended to think of path destinations and origin points: they liked to know where paths came from and where they led. Paths with clear and well-known origins and destinations had stronger identities, helped tie the city together, and gave the observer a sense of his bearings whenever he crossed them."⁴⁰ Lucid museum displays, by analogy, allow visitors to find their place in the collection, but awkward hangings leave us disoriented and frustrated. And just as it is unsettling to find unpredicted material in a book, so it can be surprising to see an out-of-place painting in a static collection. Once I was astonished to see Poussin's *Arcadian Shepherds* on loan from the Louvre in the Frick Museum. Mary Douglas posits, "Some symbolic scheme of orientations may be necessary for people to relate to one another in time and space."⁴¹ Just as painters often put the most powerful figure at the center, so museums commonly give their most valued art privileged positions. At the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's *The Triumph of Virtue and Nobility over Ignorance* is at the end of a very long sequence of galleries devoted to older European painting. On the other side, in the nineteenth-century galleries, Manet's *The Rag Picker* occupies this position. On the first floor of the Prado, Spanish painting occupies the central galleries, with Velázquez's *Las Meninas* at the far end of the largest gallery off the middle. And in the National Gallery, London, Piero's *The*

Baptism of Christ is visible from a distance, reminding us of its importance. Flanked by Piero's *Nativity* and *St. George*, this hanging stresses links between Southern and Northern European art.⁴²

Everyone knows the interpretative language applied in art writing to individual paintings. Finding a vocabulary characterizing art in the museum is, as yet, much more difficult. In his classic account of the Caravaggios in the Cerasi Chapel, S. Maria della Popolo, Leo Steinberg remarks on the difficulty of photographing the effect of walking in to view the paintings at a glancing angle.⁴³ Only in the late nineteenth century did the academic vocabulary for interpretation by description evolve, so it is not surprising that as yet we lack ways to describe experiences in the museum that we all know but are not readily able to articulate. Rudolf Wittkower explains how Annibale Carracci's frescoes in the Farnese Gallery, Palazzo Farnese, employ highly complex illusionistic effects: "Since all this decoration is contrived as if it were real—the seated youths of flesh-and-blood colour, the herms and atlantes of simulated stucco, and the roundels of simulated bronze—the contrast to the painted pictures in their gilt frames is emphasized, and the break inconsistency therefore strengthens rather than disrupts the unity of the entire ceiling."⁴⁴ A good large color photograph makes it possible to understand this fresco. But compare Wittkower's description of Francesco Borromini's S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome: "While the triads of undulating bays in the diagonals are unified by the wall treatment—niches and continuous mouldings—the dark gilt-framed pictures in the main axes seem to create effective caesuras. Borromini reconciled in this church three different structural types: the undulating lower zone . . . ; the intermediate zone of the pendentives . . . ; and the oval dome."⁴⁵ No one picture could adequately show the church. Describing an art museum is more like describing San Carlo than the Farnese Carracci ceiling.

To explain a hanging you need to identify spatial relationships among paintings, walking your reader through the gallery. In Cleveland, for example, when stepping back to see Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Andrew* you look across to the next gallery. In the distance you view Poussin's *Holy Family on the Steps*. Poussin famously said that Caravaggio came into the world to destroy painting. The hanging encourages reflection on this rivalry. When you turn around you see Tintoretto's *Baptism of Christ* and so think about the importance of Caravaggio's Venetian sources. And on

the right side of *Crucifixion of St. Andrew* is a painting by his follower Georges de la Tour. An interpretation of Caravaggio's place in art's history thus is implicit in the organization of this gallery. Well-organized museums encourage such searches for apt visual conjunctions.⁴⁶

Seeing art in a historical hanging often can influence commentary. In his review of the 1931 Matisse retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Meyer Schapiro wrote:

In hanging the paintings of Matisse in chronological order, the directors of the Museum of Modern Art have offered us a spectacle of development which is of the greatest interest. We see within the works of a single man the radical transformation of art. . . . It has the character of . . . two revolutions—the first in the sudden turn from an impressionistic style to an abstract, decorative manner . . . the second, towards 1917, in the return to naturalism.⁴⁷

The hanging made it natural to develop this historical analysis of Matisse's self-sufficient stylistic development. Displaying Matisse's *Luxe, calme et volupté* in the Musée d'Orsay close to a painting it quotes, Cross's *L'Air du soir* (1894) makes a different point, showing a source for his original art.⁴⁸ And recently in an exhibition at the Kimbell in Texas juxtaposing masterpieces by Matisse and Picasso, a different narrative was presented, focusing on the rivalry between two near-contemporaries.⁴⁹

Knowing the original site of a picture can be important. Piero della Francesca's *The Flagellation of Christ* remains in Urbino, an out-of-the-way town.⁵⁰ To see it you enter the Palazzo Ducale, walk upstairs, and proceed through the rooms leading to Guardaroba del Duca to enter a small room. In London's National Gallery, a Piero is a foreign object, but the Palazzo Ducale is in Piero's world, for the landscape around Urbino looks like the background of *The Baptism of Christ* and Piero's painted architecture is similar to the doorframe of the palazzo. The West Lake, Hangzhou, long an important center for Chinese art, is a perfect subject for painters working with ink brush on rice paper. Walking in the summer rain, you realize how a long scroll captures the effect of moving around the lake. And you learn that ink on paper is the perfect medium for showing mists. Chinese scroll paintings in American museums look different after you visit China.

Where a picture is displayed often influences how it is written about.

The Raphael *Sistine Madonna* effectively changed “from Church icon to museum picture” when in 1753 it was taken from a Piacenza church to Dresden, where Protestants devoted much attention to this painting. “In effect, the Germans created the work anew,” Belting writes.⁵¹ The only German-owned Raphael, it was discussed by many Protestant scholars and admired by Winckelmann.⁵² The picture was important to Goethe, Wagner, and Nietzsche—and to one of Freud’s patients: “She remained *two hours* in front of the Sistine Madonna, rapt in silent admiration. When I asked her what pleased her so much about the picture she could find no clear answer to make. At last she said: ‘The Madonna.’”⁵³ Saved from the fire bombing of Dresden near the end of World War II, *Sistine Madonna* is displayed in a setting that very consciously alludes to its history of interpretation.

Who owned art also legitimately influences how it is interpreted. Much can be learned about seventeenth-century tastes by studying the collection of Charles I, who was that rare creature: an aesthete king. “The absolutist form of government was felt to be an importation from the Continent, even more so the culture of the London court. Voices were heard saying that the king had been deceived to the detriment of the country through gifts of paintings, antique idols and trumperies brought from Rome.”⁵⁴ For him, as for Louis XIV, art was a political tool. “The humiliations experienced by the French monarchy during the Fronde played a determinant role in its return to protection and political use of the arts.”⁵⁵ Sometimes our understanding of the political significance of art depends on its fate after leaving the artists’ studios. Impressionism, T. J. Clark remarks, “became very quickly the house style of the haute bourgeoisie, and there are ways in which its dissolution into the decor of Palm Springs and Park Avenue is well deserved: it tells the truth of this painting’s complaisance at modernity.”⁵⁶ It is impossible to fully understand Impressionist painting without some knowledge of its present day collectors.

And *how art has been installed* long before we view it can justifiably affect our experience.⁵⁷ Mina Gregori notes that Caravaggio’s *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1601–2), “Love Triumphant,” sometime between 1629 and 1635 was “in a gallery so that it was the last picture a visitor would come upon, and . . . covered by a curtain, probably not only for reasons of decency and morality, but also to enhance the surprise aroused in the spectator

by this provocative nude painted from life.”⁵⁸ Since the claim that Caravaggio made homoerotic pictures appears only in the modern literature, that old hanging deserves analysis.⁵⁹ In April 1997, *Amor* was still in the West Berlin museum created after the war but with the rationalization of the German museums after the unification of that country, that collection is being redone. Velázquez’s *Venus with a Mirror*, to consider a related example, once hung “salaciously from the ceiling over its owner’s bed,” according to Alexander Nehamas.⁶⁰ That knowledge changes how we now see it in the National Gallery, London. Nicolas Poussin’s late *Eleazer and Rebecca at the Well*, in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, is displayed without any indication of its provenance. But this picture was long owned by Anthony Blunt, a fact that has inspired debate about the attribution.⁶¹ Some critics think that his spying infected his art writing.

Temporary hangings also can be revealing. Seeing Jackson Pollock’s *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* next to the famous photographs of the artist at work by Hans Namuth at the recent retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was different from viewing it in its present home, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁶² In those photographs, which had a significant effect on the conception of Pollock as an action painter, we watch the painting being made. This work of art was made on the floor, a radical act of experimentation. Today it is hung like a traditional easel painting. A few years ago the Museum of Modern Art, New York, hung together a small Jackson Pollock and a similar-looking painting by Janet Sobel, whose name which does not appear in the usual survey texts. The wall card read: “Back in 1944 . . . [Pollock] had noticed one or two curious paintings shown by Peggy Guggenheim’s by a ‘primitive’ painter, Janet Sobel [who was, and still is, a housewife living in Brooklyn]. Pollock (and I myself) admired these pictures rather furtively.”⁶³ The museum expects some visitors to be erudite enough to recall Clement Greenberg’s essay.

The lesson revealed by these examples deserves spelling out in a general way. Here our intuitive analysis may gain authority from appeal to the literature of phenomenology. How you see one painting can depend in subtle ways upon what other art is in the room. How you view that room influences what you expect to see when you walk further. And how you look at works of art in other galleries, in turn, is affected by the experience of entering the museum and, sometimes, by what you see in the

streets immediately outside. Because this knowledge of hangings tends to remain merely implicit, I aim to make it explicit.⁶⁴

Edmund Husserl's account of our horizon of expectations usefully describes this way in which visual experience involves both seeing what is here-and-now and having an awareness of what lies beyond the immediate perceptual field. The identity of any object involves "a series of intuitive recollections that has the open endlessness which the "I can always do so again" (as a horizon of potentiality) creates. Without such "possibilities" there would be for us no *fixed and abiding* being, no real and no ideal world."⁶⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains this point in a clearer way: "I anticipate the unseen side of the lamp because I can touch it—or a 'horizontal synthesis'—the unseen side is given to me as 'visible from another standpoint,' at once given but only immanently. . . . the perceived thing is . . . a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another."⁶⁶ Looking at the front of a building, you know that moving will reveal its sides. You would see an indiscernible flat movie set differently. In a museum, to borrow this phenomenological vocabulary, we may speak of a horizon both literally, to encompass what we see when we walk beyond one picture and also figuratively, to describe the very real influence of reading about that picture.⁶⁷

But after drawing extended attention to the influence of museum floor plans and the influence of these various hangings, I would not over-emphasize their ultimate importance. What is most remarkable about Denon, Francis Haskell writes, "is not so much the scope of his collection or the intellectual interest he showed in its historical importance as the genuine feeling that he seems to have had even for those works which least conformed to conventional taste."⁶⁸ Because the natural concern of the artist is, in Wollheim's words, "to aid our concentration upon a particular object by making the object the unique possessor of certain general characteristics," the ultimate goal of the curator is to have us attend to the individual artifacts.⁶⁹ Nothing prevents you from walking directly to some favorite painting, taking little note of the museum flow plan. Nor need you read the wall labels. And even when an exhibition is arranged chronologically, it is usually possible to walk to the end and then view the art in reverse chronological order. Perversely reading a book from back to front takes effort, but refusing to follow the ordering imposed by a

curator is easy. After a few visits to the National Gallery, London, going in chronological order, David Finn "got the idea of walking through the museum in the opposite direction. It took an enormous wrench not to begin at the beginning," he reports, but "it was as if I were seeing that part of the museum for the first time."⁷⁰ His instructive experiments remind us that the historical hangings of our museums influence—but do not entirely determine—how we see the art they display.

things that appear identical (in one respect) are then observed to differ. (4) The Ames rooms (Ittelson, *The Ames Demonstrations in Perception*, 40): two rooms, viewed with monocular vision from a proper viewpoint, "appear to be rectangular and identical. . . . Both rooms present to the retina the same pattern that would be produced by a normal rectangular room." But these especially constructed rooms have distorted walls. The first has oblique floor and ceiling and a real wall; the second, sloping walls between small floor and large ceiling. We see these oddly shaped rooms as normal rectangular rooms because, in the absence of strong contrary evidence, we believe that they are like the familiar rectangular rooms we already know.

18. What may give support to this confused way of thinking is a misleading formulation of Danto's argument. Instead of starting with two distinct things, and explaining how they are different, someone might rather imagine that one thing had two very different origins. See Carrier, "Indiscernibles and the Essence of Art."

19. Danto, *Analytic Philosophy of Action*, 28.

20. *Ibid.*, 29.

21. Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art*, 3.

22. The best-known account, Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*, has only brief remarks about art.

23. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 19. In his sympathetic summary, David Couzens Hoy speaks of how Gadamer's position "can be called *contextualism*, for according to it, the interpretation is dependent upon, or 'relative to,' the circumstances in which it occurs. . . . Since no context is absolute, different lines of interpretation are possible. But this is not radical relativism, since not all contexts are equally appropriate or justifiable" (*The Critical Circle*, 69).

24. Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, 53.

25. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 101–2.

26. *Truth and Method*, 133. Gadamer is mistaken, however, to claim: "The reconstruction of the original circumstances, like all restoration, is a pointless undertaking in view of the historicity of our being. What is reconstructed, a life brought back from the lost past, is not the original. . . . Even the painting taken from the museum and replaced in the church, or the building restored to its original condition are not what they once were—they become simply tourist attractions." Art historians can often reconstruct these original circumstances.

27. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 265, 267. In a shrewd commentary on this issue, Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, opens with the example of the Forth Bridge near Edinburgh. When looking at such a collaborative creation, what is meant, he asks, by the creator's intention?

28. Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*, 126.

29. In *Other Criteria*, 318, 320, Leo Steinberg argues that such contemporary

experience better equips us to understand art of the past; more recent commentators tend to suggest that it is not so much a matter of seeing that art as it really was made as projecting our new interpretation upon it. See Carrier, "Panofsky, Leo Steinberg, David Carrier."

30. Wind, *Art and Anarchy*, 76.

31. Goethe, *Italian Journey*, 343.

32. Mead, "The Ebb and Flow of Mana Maori," 24.

33. Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 146.

34. See Soucek, "Nizami on Painters and Painting," 12–13.

35. Schapiro, *Romanesque Art*, 23.

36. Barolsky, *Michelangelo's Nose*, 33.

37. Quoted in M. Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 202.

38. Nicholson with Keber, *Art of Aztec Mexico*, 40.

39. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 1–2.

40. *Ibid.*, 12.

41. See Donoghue, *Walter Pater*, 28.

42. See Carrier, "On the Possibility of Aesthetic Atheism."

43. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 13.

44. This argument is developed in Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*.

45. Abt, "Museum, I, 7," 360.

Chapter 5: Art Museum Narratives

1. Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*, 8–13.

2. Barolsky, *Giotto's Father and the Family of Vasari's Lives*, 20.

3. Zoffany made this picture in the Uffizi, "improving" that collection "to make the selection of pictures gayer and livelier" (Millar, *Zoffany and His Tribuna*, 22).

4. See Fong, *Beyond Representation*, 165, and Carrier, *Sean Scully*, 118–19.

5. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv.

6. Lee, *Past, Present, East and West*, 62.

7. Wollheim, *On Art and the Mind*, III.

8. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 34.

9. Lorenzetti, *Venice and Its Lagoon*, 597, 593.

10. Varnedoe, panel discussion, 51.

11. Bal, *Looking In*, 187.

12. Greenberg used this phrase in conversation with me.

13. Bal, *Looking In*, 161.

14. Serota, *Experience or Interpretation*, 55.

15. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, 143, 351.

16. Here I extend Carrier, *Writing about Visual Art*, Chapter 4.
17. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 15.
18. Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 229.
19. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 388.
20. Chantelou, *Diary of the Cavaliere Bernini's Visit to France*, 79.
21. See Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 197n24.
22. Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art*, 9. Stephen Jay Gould makes a similar point about natural history museums: "Most museum halls are rectangles with a preferred linear flow of visitors in one direction along the major axis. All the exhibitions on the history of life that I have ever seen in any museum, anywhere in the world . . . use the bias of progress as a central principle for arranging organisms" (*Dinosaur in a Haystack*, 251).
23. Carrier, *Artwriting*, 35. I then gave too much importance to Greenberg and too little to Alfred H. Barr.
24. Krauss, "Postmodernism's Museum without Walls," 43.
25. Gaskell, *Vermeer's Wager*, 86.
26. See Findlen, *Possessing Nature*.
27. See Rosenberg and Dupuy, *Dominique-Vivant Denon*.
28. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:870.
29. Jackson, *The Museum*, 21.
30. See Carrier, "Remembering the Past."
31. The original source for this discussion deserves mention, for it helps explain my reasoning. Frances Yates discussed the origin and development of the memory theater, and Gombrich linked her account to the museum (see Gombrich, *Ideals and Idols*, 204). At a banquet the poet Simonides, who recited a poem in honor of the host, was called out. During his absence, the roof fell in, killing all of the guests. Because Simonides remembered where the guests were sitting, he is able to identify the bodies. "This experience suggested to the poet the principles of the art of memory of which he is said to have been the inventor" (Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 2). The poet remembers by associating things with places in some large building. Yates's tracing out of the long uses of this memory theater suggests that there might be some relationship between that institution and the art museum. So far as I know, no concrete connection has been established. Perhaps none exists, for by the time that historically organized art museums were established, the memory theater had lost its once prominent place in the intellectual culture and became merely a conjuring device discussed in self-help books for people who wanted to improve their memory. But there is an important conceptual relationship between these memory techniques and the complex narrative orderings provided by our art museums.
32. Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art*, 22.
33. Hitchcock, *The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery*, n.p.

34. Haskell, "Museums and Their Enemies," 21.
35. One exception to this generalization is Hahnloser-Ingold, "Collecting Matisse of the 1920s in the 1920s."
36. Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, xxi.
37. But see Waterfield, *Palaces of Art*.
38. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 24.
39. Beyer, "Between Academic and Exhibition Practice," 29.
40. K. Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 54.
41. Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 11.
42. See Amery, *The National Gallery Sainsbury Wing*.
43. Steinberg, "Observations in the Cerasi Chapel."
44. Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 66.
45. *Ibid.*, 201, 202.
46. "On the surface, it appears that visitors do not spend much time looking at works of art. But visitors experience museums much more holistically than the data indicate" (Schloder, Williams, De Bevec, and Mann, *The Visitor's Voice*, 76).
47. Schapiro, "Matisse and Impressionism," 289.
48. I owe this example to Wright, *Identity Trouble*, 162.
49. See Carrier, "Picasso/Matisse."
50. See Bucci and Torriti, *Il palazzo ducale di Urbino*, and Macadam, *Blue Guide*, 381–83.
51. Belting, *The Invisible Masterpiece*, 52, 53. Chapter 2 is devoted to this Raphael.
52. See Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing*, 240–41.
53. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 7:96.
54. See von Holst, *Creators, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, 127.
55. Schnapper, "From Politics to Collecting," 120.
56. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 267–68.
57. The Getty Research Institute groups some books—catalogues raisonnés, histories of collections, and the various indexes of painting published by the Getty—in a special section, the Provenance Index. See Fredericksen, *Corpus of Paintings and The Index of Paintings*.
58. Mina Gregori, Caravaggio's *Amor Vincit Omnia*, 277.
59. See Carrier, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace."
60. Nehamas, "The Art of Being Unselfish," 63. José López-Rey merely reports: "I have been unable to identify conclusively the room on whose ceiling the painting was placed; it might have been a bedchamber" (*Velázquez*, 452).
61. See Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt*, 499.
62. See Karmel, "Pollock at Work."
63. Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 218.
64. On the history of hangings, see Waterfield, *Palaces of Art*.

65. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 60.
66. Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 15–16.
67. The concept of horizons, developed in phenomenology, can be formulated within the framework of Arthur Danto's analytic philosophy.
68. Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*, 84.
69. Wollheim, *On Art and the Mind*, 111.
70. Finn, *How to Visit a Museum*, 23.

Chapter 6: Isabella Stewart Gardner's Museum

1. Tribby, "Body/Building," 158.
2. See de Grazia, Quilligan, and Stallybrass, introduction to *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*. Classicists have explored "the importance of the art collection in the creation of an image of the collector" (Vasaly, *Representations*, 109n35).
3. Muensterberger, *Collecting*, 255. American collectors were motivated, it has been claimed, by the desire to imitate the Medici, banker-collectors (Einreinhofer, *The American Art Museum*, 1).
4. Getty, *The Joys of Collecting*, 7.
5. See Carrier, "Mrs. Isabella Stewart Gardner's Titian"; and Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, 7–45.
6. Goldfarb, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*.
7. Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner*, 55–56. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, considered purchasing this painting, but ultimately thought it too much of a risk; see Morris Carter, *Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court*, 158.
8. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, 73.
9. See Mather, *Venetian Painters*.
10. Nash, *Veiled Images*, 60.
11. Hendy, *European and American Paintings*, 371.
12. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian*, 166.
13. Hills, *Venetian Colour*, 224.
14. "Visitor Guide" and "An Eye for Art," n.p.
15. In *Diana Discovered by Actaeon*, the hunter Actaeon's inadvertent sighting of the nude Diana causes his death. She turns him into a stag, and so his dogs tear him to death. And in *Perseus and Andromeda* the nude Andromeda watches as Perseus fights the monster that would kill her.
16. L. Adams, *Art and Psychoanalysis*, 233–54.
17. Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 4:208.
18. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 348, 505n7.

19. See J. Brown, *Kings and Connoisseurs*. Velázquez's painting, also about metamorphosis, tells another story from Ovid. Arachne imprudently boasted that she was superior to Pallas in weaving. Pallas challenged her, and after victory turned Arachne into a spider. *The Fable of Arachne* shows Pallas in disguise, Athena, and in the background is the portion of Arachne's tapestry showing the rape of Europa. Copied (with minor changes) from Titian's painting, it "is homage to Titian, public acknowledgment of an inspiration which is especially evident in many of the latest pictures. . . . Velázquez has made a rare, if not unique, use of Titian's favourite colour, the pure ultramarine; and it is contrasted, as Titian loved to contrast it, with rose and gold" (Hendy, *Spanish Painting*, 23–24). Wanting to outdo Titian, Velázquez shows the spinning wheel, presenting an illusion of movement not found in the earlier master's art. See Bedaux, "Velázquez's Fable of Arachne."
20. Pater, *The Renaissance*, 24, 34, 50, 109.
21. See Steegmuller, *The Two Lives of James Jackson Jarves*.
22. James, *The American Scene*, 252.
23. Pater, *The Renaissance*, 128. In *Giorgione*, Jaynie Anderson discusses his iconography.
24. Pater, *The Renaissance*, 129, 134.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 139. Berenson shared this view, observing that an artist's "civic status can be of interest only in the measure that it throws light on his artistic personality" (Berenson, *Homeless Paintings of the Renaissance*, 103).
27. *Ibid.*, 222.
28. Charles Eliot Norton, father of American art history and Berenson's teacher, called *The Renaissance* a book "only fit to be read only in the bathroom" (Kantor, "The Beginnings of Art History at Harvard" 161). On collecting of Italian art in America before Berenson, see Steegmuller, "An Approach to James Jackson Jarves." In *William and Henry Walters, the Reticent Collectors*, William Johnston gives an account of another pioneering American collector, who employed Berenson.
29. Mallock, *The New Republic*, 27–28.
30. Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 270. See also Carrier, "Baudelaire, Pater and the Origins of Modernism."
31. Berenson, *One Year's Reading for Fun (1942)*; Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 105.
32. Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 115.
33. Levey, *The Case of Walter Pater*, 186.
34. See Schapiro, "Mr. Berenson's Values," and Court, "The Matter of Pater's 'Influence.'"
35. Pater, *The Renaissance*, 179.