

Current Comments®

EUGENE GARFIELD

INSTITUTE FOR SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION®
3501 MARKET ST. PHILADELPHIA, PA 19104

Reinterpreting the Legacy of Albert C. Barnes. Part 1. Richard Glanton Shapes a New Image for Philadelphia's Best-Kept Secret

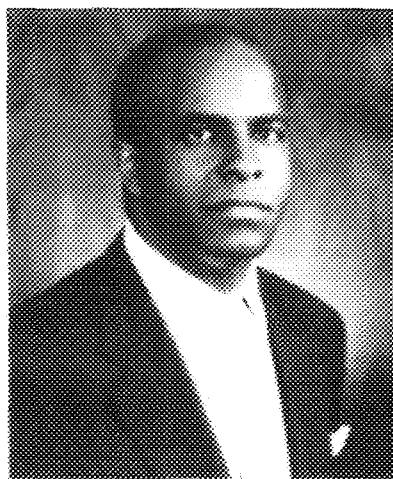
Number 13

April 1, 1991

Readers of *Current Contents*® (CC®) are well aware that I am fascinated by the creative process.¹ Of course, this is not unrelated to our many discussions of art and its many connections to science.²⁻⁴ A recent article in *The New York Times* reported that the Barnes Foundation near Philadelphia "is undergoing a sea change."⁵ However, *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* had anticipated this story several months earlier.⁶ Since the Barnes Foundation and its art collection were the subject of CC essays back in 1982,^{7,8} I felt it was important to reprint the article by Lucinda Fleeson, a staff writer for the magazine, in CC.

Named after its creator Albert Coombs Barnes, the institution is just a short drive from the ISI building in University City, in West Philadelphia. I have often treated visitors to a tour of this wondrous place. Now governed by Lincoln University, in Chester County, a small, predominantly black school of higher learning, the Barnes institution houses an art collection dominated by large numbers of impressionist masterpieces with a value estimated a few years ago at perhaps more than \$1 billion.

Despite this surfeit of theoretical wealth, the Barnes Foundation enjoys a relatively modest endowment of \$10 million, barely enough to keep it open three days a week. But a new president, Richard H. Glanton, a lawyer by trade, hopes to retire the old image of the institution as a nearly impenetrable private castle and embrace the concept of a public museum.



Richard H. Glanton

However, Barnes, a colorful figure with, at times, an acid personality, left an exclusionary will that is a testament to his remarkably tempestuous life. He placed many legal strictures on his surviving trustees that bind them to perpetuating his idiosyncratic style.

For example, though Glanton, a lawyer who has a limited background in art, is under severe financial stress, he is barred from selling a single piece from the collection of more than 1,000 works, some of which would fetch many millions of dollars. The collection contains 170 Renoirs and 55 Cézannes, not to mention pieces by Rubens, Goya, Picasso, Seurat, Titian, and other masters. Some of them were purchased at

ridiculously low prices in the late 1920s and early 1930s with money made from the sale of Argyrol, a popular antiseptic and disinfectant of the period.⁹

Despite its justified reputation for being a very reclusive institution, Barnes once described it as being for "the plain people, that is, men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores, and similar places." It would seem wisdom would dictate that the sale of a few of the works in the collection to meet financial necessities, such as the upkeep of buildings, paintings, and other administrative matters, would be a prudent course to follow at this point in time.

As mentioned earlier, Fleeson's article (Part 1 appears in this issue, Part 2 in the April 15, 1991, issue of *CC*) appeared recently in *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*. It serves to add interesting details about Barnes's life not touched on in our earlier essays. It particularly fleshes out his relationship with two of the important women in his life—his wife, Laura, and his long-time associate, Violette de Mazia. It also introduces Glanton to the continuing controversial saga, explaining his quest to bring the Barnes Foundation into the

twenty-first century while still retaining a measure of eccentricity and the fundamentals of Barnes's precepts on the nature of creativity.

Barnes, who carried on an almost life-long battle with the established art critics of his time, believed, as he noted in his book *The Art in Painting*,¹⁰ that a work should "reveal to us the qualities in objects and situations which are significant, which have the power to move us esthetically. The artist must open our eyes to what, unaided, we could not see.... A landscape...should catch the spirit of the scene; a portrait...what is essential or characteristic of the sitter."

Historically, the Barnes Foundation has regarded itself as an educational facility for art rather than a museum. Housed in a French Renaissance-style mansion, the museum and other main buildings, including an arboretum, are surrounded by acres of beautifully landscaped grounds.

Up to now, I have thought of the Barnes as one of Philadelphia's best-kept secrets. The collection is indisputably one of the finest displays of French modern paintings in the world. I hope you will enjoy the piece that follows even though Albert Barnes might have castigated it.

© 1991 ISI

REFERENCES

1. **Garfield E.** Can scientific creativity be measured? Speech presented at Complutense University, 25 July 1990. Madrid, Spain. 45 p.
2. ----- Fine art enhances ISI's new building. *Current Contents* (5):5-9, 2 February 1981. (Reprinted in: *Essays of an information scientist*. Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1983. Vol. 5. p. 15-9.)
3. ----- Huichol mythology and culture. Part 1. World's largest yarn painting is latest in series of ISI-commissioned artworks. *Current Contents* (28):5-11, 13 July 1981. (Reprinted in: *Ibid.* p. 164-70.)
4. ----- Works of art at ISI: Jennifer Bartlett's "In the Garden" and "Interpenetrations" by Handel Evans. *Current Contents* (33):5-10, 17 August 1981. (Reprinted in: *Ibid.* p. 207-12.)
5. **Kummelman M.** Trying to open the Barnes door and pay some of its bills, too. *New York Times* 7 February 1991. p. C19.
6. **Fleeson L.** Opening the Barnes door. *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* 11 November 1990. p. 22-35.
7. **Garfield E.** The legacy of Albert C. Barnes. Part 1. The tempestuous life of a scientist/art collector. *Current Contents* (5):5-12, 1 February 1982. (Reprinted in: *Op cit.* p. 387-94.)
8. ----- The legacy of Albert C. Barnes. Part 2. The Barnes Foundation. *Current Contents* (12):5-12, 22 March 1982. (Reprinted in: *Ibid.* p. 455-63.)
9. **Greenfield H.** *The devil and Dr. Barnes: portrait of an American art collector*. New York: Viking, 1987. 296 p.
10. **Barnes A C.** *The art in painting*. Merion Station, PA: Barnes Foundation Press. (1925) 1976. 522 p.