

The Barnes Foundation

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Registration Intern

Dr. Albert C. Barnes

Gained wealth through pharmaceutical industry (developed an antiseptic to treat eye infections), then turned to collecting art

Collecting efforts centered around “modern” art

Worked with dealers in NY and Europe; bought directly from artists

Assembled the collection over 4 decades (1912-1951)





History of the Foundation

- Barnes used the collection to support the art education programs that had grown out of the courses he had developed for the workers at his pharmaceutical company
 - Emphasized experiential learning through looking at art to develop critical thinking skills
- Galleries in the house at Merion were opened to the public in 1961
 - Legal complications had prevented previous public access
 - Barnes' indenture of trust limited public access to prioritize the school
 - Merion site also has an arboretum, developed by Laura Barnes (his wife)
- Moved to a new building on Ben Franklin Parkway in 2012
 - Built to the same plan as the original Merion house

Mission

- From the website: “The mission of the Barnes is to promote the advancement of education and the appreciation of the fine arts and horticulture. Our founder, Dr. Albert C. Barnes, believed that art had the power to improve minds and transform lives. Our diverse educational programs are based on his teachings and one-of-a-kind collections—both his art holdings in Philadelphia and the rare trees, flowers, and other plants at the Barnes Arboretum.”
- Today, this plays out in school visits and adult education courses
 - The “art team” is a group of art history scholars who teach courses, give talks, and do research

Exhibitions



- Two main spaces: Collection Galleries and Special Exhibition Gallery
- Collection galleries (permanent collection) are installed in Dr. Barnes' final 1951 arrangement
- The collection is organized in groupings called "ensembles" based on the visual properties of the works (color, light, line, and space)
 - Pictured here is Room 9
- Installation is not reflective of chronology or geography or even theme/content

Exhibitions

- Inclusion of metalwork, furniture, and textiles reflects Barnes' belief in the coexistence of "fine" and "decorative" arts alongside "ordinary objects"
- Collection also includes art from Native American, African, and East Asian cultures
 - These objects are unfortunately but unsurprisingly some of the least well-researched in the collection
- Special exhibitions are a way for the Foundation to display objects in the collections that aren't in the galleries, as well as host loans and traveling shows
 - Like most museums, the Barnes does have a fairly large amount of objects in storage, although not quite as much as other institutions

What is Registration?

- The Registrar's Office at the Barnes is just one person - my supervisor
- What a Registrar does:
 - Input-output center of the museum: anything that comes into the museum or goes out (for Any Reason) needs to pass through the Registrar
- Main categories of responsibility:
 - Acquisitions/accessions – new objects
 - Loans (incoming and outgoing) – communicating with other institutions and private lenders
 - Exhibitions (coordinating, not developing or designing) – organizing install, upkeep, and deinstall (especially if loans are involved)
 - Storage – keeping track of everything, maintaining storage areas/facilities
 - At some institutions, rights and reproductions may also fall under the jurisdiction of the Registrar (can also fall under Publications)

Registration at the Barnes

- Because of this, the Registrar works with just about everyone across the museum
 - Usually works closest with Conservation because both departments are focused on collections care
 - Things like condition reports might even require conservator input, depending on the institution's CMP
 - At the Barnes, the registrar reports to the head of conservation
 - Works with Curatorial and Exhibition Design departments on exhibitions
 - Example: during the install for Cuttoli, everyone was in the room every day for two weeks (curator, registrar, conservators, preparators)



View from the Special Exhibition gallery

My Projects

- First month or so was focused on the **Cuttoli** install
 - Prep for install included keeping the exhibition checklist (list of all objects in the show) updated as we received new info from lenders re: shipping
 - Adding crate dimensions, generating crate numbers and labels
 - Keeping TMS (collections database) updated
 - This is a pretty typical intern job in any registrar's office, so I keep a notebook of How To TMS that I take with me from institution to institution
 - During install, you're more likely to be called on for odd jobs ("other duties as assigned" is a fixture in any registration job description), e.g. assembling printed templates of works that haven't arrived yet to mock up the arrangements



Templates of works by Le Corbusier (left) and Man Ray

My Projects

- We also always have to be working on the next thing
 - Sometimes that's the next exhibition – I had to compile a batch of loan letters for an upcoming show to be used in a grant application
 - Registrar is responsible for coordinating insurance and appraisals – I generated fact sheets (all the information in our database on a given set of objects) for a group of objects due to be appraised by Christie's
- Keeping mountains of documentation organized is the hardest part of the job
 - Cross-referencing old insurance values with database entries to make sure everything's in there
- Since going remote I've been doing largely professional development work
 - C2C Care webinars and ARCS conference archives
- Recently started a new ongoing project: cleaning up our TMS data entry standards into a single more organized manual