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Bertha Palmer and Anna Wintour: How Does Private Patronage Impact Identity-Building within Cultural Institutions?

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Bertha Palmer and Anna Wintour:
How Does Private Patronage Impact Identity-Building within Cultural Institutions?

by
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Abstract

Founded to provide a young nation with cultural foundations and dedicated to educating its public, the large historic cultural institutions of the United States find their origin in private initiatives and of private-public-partnerships for the benefit of the communities they serve. This thesis outlines that, at its core, museums and their funding structures in the United States exist in the format we find today because of the active and informed contributions of their patrons. It is these contributions that have shaped the American museum landscape over the course of its history.

Two case studies – Bertha Palmer and her bequest to the Art Institute of Chicago, and Anna Wintour and the Met Gala – will demonstrate that while donorship mechanisms have changed since the inception of many cultural institutions in the United States in the 1870s, the relationships between patrons and institutions still function within the same operational framework and reveal the same theoretical structures. Utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework on different forms of capital provides a baseline through which the two case studies can be compared and analyzed.

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Introduction

The earliest American art museums and cultural institutions are founded and chartered in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of private initiatives to the public benefit of their communities. These private initiatives quickly came to partner with public entities and governments and present to this day quintessential examples of successful public-private partnerships. While art patronage had existed since antiquity and continues to exist in the modern world in a multitude of forms, this investment of individuals directed toward institutions continues to present a vital aspect in the development of the art world. Particularly, in today's museum landscape in the United States, patronage, especially in the form of monetary contributions from wealthy private individuals, continues to play a crucial role in annual and long-term fiscal planning and budgeting. A steady decline in government support over the last few decades, has led museums to rely more and more heavily on such private donations.

When investigating these dependencies between institutions and private supporters, one needs to start the investigation with the historical context of museum founding processes in the United States and how it differs from their European counterparts. Among the oldest of the great public art museum in Europe, the Louvre can serve as a model for the historic evolution of European art museums. Following the French Revolution, the French National Assembly opened the Louvre as a museum making the collections of the royal family public. This arc is one that repeats itself in many collections across the European continent, such as for example the Prado in Madrid, the

Alte Pinakothek in Munich, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, to name a few.

By contrast, the collections of many of today's great American museums find their origin in private initiatives. Driven by a desire to establish cultural institutions as a way to mature as a nation after the Civil War, public-private partnerships emerged as a specifically American form of institution-building. The founding document of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York reads that the institution is established "for the purpose of encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the application of the arts to manufacture and practical life, of advancing general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, furnishing popular instruction and recreation."¹ In a moment of deliberate push for cultural expansion, providing brick-and-mortar spaces to facilitate collecting, maintaining, and learning was a project most popular for early patrons of the arts. As the second chapter in this thesis will demonstrate, museum history in the United States can be traced along the history of its most significant patrons.

This thesis will argue that the structures in which museums in the United States operate today are a result of their founders' intentions. It is that specific initiative that is carried forward into the present by the continuing involvement of private individuals. Two case studies – separated by well over a century – will exhibit these essential dynamics and provide evidence to the fact.

The first case is Bertha Palmer. A fierce agent of change in her own right, she was a Gilded Age Chicago art collector and early patron of the Art Institute of Chicago. Assembling and curating one of the most significant private collections of Impressionist

¹ Charter of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1870, 1.

paintings in the 1880s and 1890s, she is partially responsible for creating a market for these painters in the United States, and for encouraging her contemporaries as well as the Art Institute of Chicago to purchase and collect the works of the Impressionists. After her death in 1918, fifty-one paintings from her art collection, including some of the most notable names of nineteenth century artists, entered the Art Institute of Chicago's collection at her bequest. Introduced to the museum as *The Potter Palmer Collection* in 1922, these works had a profound impact on the institution at a crucial point in its development. The chapter dedicated to her and her bequest, Chapter III, will further illustrate this significance.

The second case is the Metropolitan Museum of Art's annual Benefit for the Costume Institute, also known as the Met Gala. While the Met Gala does not raise funds from a single patron, rather a group of patrons, the uniqueness of the event, the influence Anna Wintour has had to assure the increasing success of the event since she first got involved in 1995, and the impact of the Gala on the development of the Costume Institute exhibit the impact of large-scale art patronage on institutional development. Situated in the discussion of whether fashion should be considered art, one of the most successful fundraising events of the museum landscape in the United States invites deeper analysis of its mark on a single curatorial department.

In order to create a baseline of comparison, theoretical framework from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as outlined in his theory on the Forms of Capital² is introduced the first chapter. While developed for a different context, Bourdieu's theory, applied to the U.S.

² Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258.

context, allows this research to operate within a unique intersection of disciplines. By utilizing Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the following chapters will demonstrate the structural forces that explain one perspective of the evolution the Art Institute of Chicago and the Metropolitan Museum of Art over time. Connecting this evolution to more than economic holdings, but to invisible forces of inherent social standing is only possible with this kind of intersectional vocabulary.

Whereas Bertha Palmer's donation to the Art Institute of Chicago is a classic example of a one-time donation that created a ripple effect within the institution, the Met Gala's impact and role for the Costume Institute is anything but traditional. Bringing together two examples from different time periods provides insight into institutional and departmental identity development and growth, and the impact on perception of institutional legitimacy. The goal of this thesis is to trace seemingly different patterns of donor mechanisms which, nevertheless, function within the same framework and reflect the same theoretical social structures. A baseline understanding of these mechanisms over time also allows us to project their continuing validity into the future.

I. Theoretical Framework: Pierre Bourdieu: The Forms of Capital

At the outset of this study, an introduction to Bourdieu's theory will serve to acquaint the reader with Bourdieu's concepts of different forms of capital, which will then act as a red line throughout the subsequent pages of this thesis. It guides the paradigm in which this research was undertaken.

When thinking about the operational forces of society, it quickly becomes clear that merely looking at a country's history or its political system does not do justice to the complexity of its social life. The power structures in each interaction, the habituated behaviors of each individual in every-day situations, or the simplicity of a conversation between two individuals rest on frameworks invisible to the human eye. As a science, sociology is relatively young. A scientific discipline dedicated to observing human existence within social environment, theories such as Bourdieu's create intersections between the economic and the social.

In the social sciences, there are two main types of theories that aim to frame the intricacies of Western societies – agent-based and system-based theories. As the terms suggest, the foundation on which these theories rest determines not only the environments in which they operate, but also how these environments come to be. Agent-based theories assume individuals, or groups of individuals, create the societal relationships and environments in which we operate. System-based theories assume systems or partial systems, such as the law, the economy, or art are the cause for our social system.

Bourdieu's theory on the different types of capital is a classic example of an agent-based social theory. In the very first sentence of the 1986 essay *The Forms of Capital*³ the sociologist states that "the social world is accumulated history [...] not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles."⁴ The paradigm in which he sees modern society operating is set by the agents within. He states that the individual is not an easily exchangeable part of a whole, but rather dictates how the social world operates at any given moment.

In its purest form, capital is "accumulated labor"⁵ which enables individuals and groups "to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor,"⁶ meaning, it is not something one is simply handed. Effort and maintenance are required in order to reap the rewards and effects once capital is accumulated. It is not a finite entity that once achieved, remains. It is constantly in motion. It is a force so deeply engraved in both the evident and the hidden structures of the social world, it becomes an underlying principle and regulating agent of sorts.

The structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.⁷

³ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258.

⁴ Ibid, 241.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 241-242.

Bourdieu goes further in his observations on capital and defines three different types. Economic capital encompasses the traditional capital concept with which society and the financial world is familiar. By reducing human interaction to a series of mercantile exchanges, however, economic theory has excluded non-economic transaction from the process of maximizing one's profit, therefore ignoring the fact that "the world of bourgeois man, with his double-entry accounting, cannot be invented without producing the pure, perfect universe of the artist and the intellectual and the gratuitous activities of art-for-art's sake and pure theory."⁸ Bourdieu's aim is to create a "general science of the economy of practices,"⁹ where mercantile exchange is merely a single aspect of the equation of human interaction in which the differentiated forms of capital dictate the laws by which social structures operate.

Cultural capital exists in the embodied, the objectified, and the institutionalized state. He links the embodied state of cultural capital to "culture,"¹⁰ or "cultivation,"¹¹ a sort of abstract sophistication which must be regarded as a long-term investment into the own person, a work of optimization of the self. It therefore becomes part of one's personality, a way of living and interacting with the surrounding world. It cannot be directly transferred from one person to the next "like the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan."¹² Once embodied cultural capital is recognized by the social world, it is not seen as such, but rather as genuine competence and authority. This competence is then

⁸ Ibid, 242.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 244.

¹² Ibid.

compared to other capital possessors' competence, which in turn creates invisible hierarchy laws and the power to impose them.¹³

The logic of transmission of embodied cultural capital happens unnoticed by legal papers, property rights, or financial ledgers. While embodied cultural capital is something one has to achieve oneself, stratified societies provide the base conditions whereby the distribution of such capital is more or less predetermined by heredity and existing cultural capital within the familial settings of one's upbringing.¹⁴

Cultural capital in the objectified state is "material objects and media, such as writings, painting, monuments, instruments, etc."¹⁵ They are therefore transferred most easily – either for economic profit, or for the symbolic conviction accompanying the possession of material cultural capital. While possessing such an object, however the holder can only consume the object if proper conceptual and historical foundations of embodied cultural capital exist. That means that ownership of the material object can pass easily, however, cultural capital in the objectified state can only pass coincidentally if the new owner possesses at least as much embodied cultural capital as the vendor.¹⁶

Cultural capital in the institutionalized state is somewhat connected to objectified cultural capital, in the sense that once institutionalized, objectified cultural capital takes on the form of academic qualifications. This means that this type of cultural capital becomes a quantifiable, measurable parameter that makes it possible to compare and convert between cultural and economic capital.

¹³ Ibid, 245-246.

¹⁴ Ibid, 246.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 247.

Contrary to cultural capital, the idea of social capital is something less abstract and more familiar to the layperson. There is a general awareness around the effectiveness and power of such capital derived from networks because everyone belongs to their own personal network.

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.¹⁷

Social capital, Bourdieu states, is based on material and symbolic relationships of exchange in constant need of maintenance and attention. Existing in a space of economic and social proximity, social capital never works independently of other types of capital due to “the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgement of objective homogeneity.”¹⁸ In other words, any individual’s volume of social capital depends on their ability to mobilize the network they possess through their perceived volume of other forms of capital. These exchanges build up social capital. It therefore takes effort and endless reproduction to build one’s network and to create a sustainable network of lasting relationships.

The access to such a network, institutionalized by a common group name, family, club membership, etc., is defined by scarcity and exclusivity where “members of the group must regulate the conditions of access to the right to declare oneself a member of the group.”¹⁹ This is directly connected to social mobility and social inequality. Not only are

¹⁷ Ibid, 248-249.

¹⁸ Ibid, 249.

¹⁹ Ibid, 251.

the different forms of capital derived from economic capital which grants access to time and institutions built to construct one's capital, but an inherent multiplier effect takes place when all forms of capital are wielded at the same time in spaces where such capital is acknowledged and respected.²⁰

Bourdieu realizes that societies of the twentieth century exist under the umbrella of capitalism and therefore function in a way where economic capital dictates a person's power within the social environments in which they choose to live and operate. While he describes capital as something a person possesses, Bourdieu acts under the assumption that capital functions the way it does due to the way other people perceive the capital a person possesses. Therefore, it is not only something that works solely within the individual, but its external force becomes symbolic power.

The theoretical framework introduced in this first chapter offers a baseline to which the research on the two case studies returns to frequently. Finding its application in these two distinct moments in the history of art museums, this theory allows for intersectional contrast and comparison which would otherwise not be a possible mission. The next chapter will offer another such baseline, albeit a historical one rather than a theoretical one.

²⁰ Ibid, 250-252.

II. The Inception of the American Museum: A Snapshot

City history, cultural heritage, and anchoring within a cultural paradigm become identity pillars for a city and its inhabitants. When comparing large urban hubs in Europe and the United States, historical differences quickly emerge. Whereas European cities oftentimes have history going back millennia, the origin of American cities can be found when European settlers colonized land in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. European capitals therefore draw from a long and rich history to construct identity. Large urban centers of the US have existed within a completely different historical paradigm and consequently had the opportunity to construct their own identity and socio-economic position.

The presence of large art museums in significant urban environments and the history of their respective cities and countries are deeply intertwined. The founding of art museums in America was driven by a desire to formulate civic identity and grow into a mature nation. When some of the most significant art institutions were founded in the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the United States of America were a mere one hundred years old. The Civil War had just ended, and the country was at a turning point. It is common for countries to turn inward after the end of a war and grapple with the destruction and social trauma. Wanting to leave behind the horrors of the Civil War, the focus was then shifted toward projects of nation-building.²¹ In this post-

²¹ Margaret R. Laster and Chelsea Bruner, ed., *New York: Art and Cultural Capital of the Gilded Age*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 1.

Civil War moment of deliberate introspection, Americans sought to understand how to lead their nation into the future and where to build the necessary foundations.²²

The end of the nineteenth century marks a time when rebuilding the country's core was at the forefront of government and society alike. The footprint of a systematic economy had been laid when settlers first arrived on the continent and the cross-Atlantic enslaved trade was established. The decades after the Civil War, however, are comparatively consequential to the makeup of the economic, political, and social system of the United States. The evolution of the United States as a global economic powerhouse and the expansion of modern American capitalism can in part find their beginnings in these post-Civil War decades.²³

Wealth and private sponsorship²⁴ of civic initiatives existed in the United States before the Civil War. The idea, however, that cultural stewardship is a matter of private initiative deployed in conjunction with public involvement by those with the economic capital to do so, reached its moment of action in the post-Civil War economic expansion. The desire was to develop cities with a foundation of arts and culture. City identity consequently became something with which not only city officials were tasked, but also something in which affluent professionals could execute their vision of a modern society.²⁵

It is within this context that wealthy elites of the 1870s, 80s, and 90s become the first generation of professionals and patrons. In the absence of personal income tax,

²² Ibid, 2.

²³ Ibid, 1-2.

²⁴ In the context of this thesis, private sponsorship, patronage, and stewardship mean the financial contributions made by wealthy private individuals toward public entities, such as cultural institutions.

²⁵ Margaret R. Laster and Chelsea Bruner, ed., *New York: Art and Cultural Capital of the Gilded Age*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 3.

businessmen who made their money in the “subsequent postwar boom of real estate, industry, and finance,”²⁶ were able to allocate funds to start collections of their own. This in turn led to the development of a network of collectors and “like-minded leaders”²⁷ who sought to spearhead the development of the cultural landscape of the United States.²⁸ Enriched by the social and cultural capital gained by economic success, this group of people is responsible for leading the cultural expansion in cities such as New York and Chicago.

In the new postwar landscape, “the agents of progress would be the corporate combinations,” and the new leaders, “wealthy, culturally elite, professionally expert, charismatically managerial.” Perhaps most significantly, this generation’s objectives were shaped by their consolidation as a socioeconomic group. As never before, a new class of bourgeois and elite citizens consciously sought to transform their city into a thriving cosmopolitan mecca that would rival the great historic capitals of Europe, just as they themselves sought to redefine the terms art and culture for their epoch.²⁹

As citizens and politicians sought to find foundations through which they could celebrate the appreciation of art and culture, building cultural institutions emerged as one of the most important solutions on their quest. While some of the oldest public museums in America predate the Civil War, such as the Hartford Atheneum, it is the 1870s that brought about the foundation of many major art museums and cultural institutions, as for example the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1870), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1876), or the Art Institute of Chicago (1879).

²⁶ Ibid, 2.

²⁷ Jeffrey Abt, “The Origins of the Public Museum,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 130.

²⁸ Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum: From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870-1930* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), 5.

²⁹ Margaret R. Laster and Chelsea Bruner, ed., *New York: Art and Cultural Capital of the Gilded Age*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 2

These foundations were driven by a desire to create a cultural landscape that would transform American cities from national hubs into international urban destinations. There was an understanding, however, that European museums, whose “princely collections”³⁰ had been built over generations, were somewhat out of reach. Though it was not just the collections that concerned the founders. The Louvre, for example, stood as a symbol of the French people overcoming the tyranny of French absolutism during the French revolution. In that sense, this act became a symbol for modern nation-building in itself.³¹ By contrast, the Metropolitan Museum of Art existed on paper after its founding in 1870, but would not make its first large acquisitions until 1871. Only in February 1872, the institution moved into its first building.³²

The fact that these institutions were founded without collections, spaces to house these collections, or staff to care for the art, shows a deeply rooted aspiration to build anew and start from within. It is exactly this notion of civic and philanthropic engagement at the highest level that makes the project of the American public museum distinctly American. The desire was for museums to stand as symbols of a young nation that celebrates art and culture, and houses of education for the public.

Public museum founders were faced with many challenges. Whereas the tradition of collecting and displaying art had existed on the European continent since the days of the Wunderkammer (cabinet of curiosities³³) in the sixteenth century, the founders of the American museum were given a blank page. Since no public American museum existed

³⁰ Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum: From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870-1930* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), 2.

³¹ Jeffrey Abt, “The Origins of the Public Museum,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 115.

³² Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 1872, 19.

³³ Translation by the author

yet in the grand scale they were envisioned, without a blueprint to guide them, founders had the freedom to create these institutions in a way they thought most beneficial for the cities in which they would be situated. Questions such as location, architecture, and display choices had to be investigated. Without a clear model of the collection, public taste, or even what type of building would lend itself for their project, vast possibilities lay before them.³⁴

Looking to Europe in the early days was one way founding patrons found inspiration for this project. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the goal was never to create exact copies of European institutions in the United States. It was clear that emulating the European model was not a possible route to take as there was no significant European museum in the late nineteenth century that come into existence as a result of private initiative. In that sense, the founding generation of the American museum landscape had the freedom to choose which aspects of public European museums would lend themselves most ideally to their vision.

The new American museum was to be just as impressive as their European counterparts, however less intimidating, and more inviting.³⁵ The newly founded South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum)³⁶ emerged as an ideal type in discussions of possible museum models due to its collection and its showcasing practices.³⁷ Consequently, the priority became to start collections of “fine arts, natural

³⁴ Jay Cantor, “Temples of the Arts: Museum Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America”, *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 28, no. 8 (April 1970): 331.

³⁵ Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum: From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870-1930* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), 2.

³⁶ The South Kensington Museum was founded in 1851 and renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899.

³⁷ Jay Cantor, “Temples of the Arts: Museum Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America”, *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 28, no. 8 (April 1970): 331.

history, and scientific curiosities”³⁸ to present to the public as sources of education. There was a feeling that most European museums had become “graveyards”³⁹ of art, with their endless rows of picture frames. Charles Hutchinson, the founding president of the Art Institute of Chicago, even remarked that “the collection [of the Louvre] would be so much more satisfactory if one-half of it was removed.”⁴⁰

The following decades into the early twentieth century represented a “period of consolidation and professionalization”⁴¹ for the American art museum. In 1906, the American Association for museums was founded, and in 1908, the Philadelphia Museum led the first museum studies course “for the training of curators of museums.”⁴² The commitment to developing modern and sophisticated institutions in the United States, ones that would contribute to the education of the public to further “cultural progress, identity, and self-knowledge,”⁴³ was at the forefront of museum professionals and private supporters alike. The idea that a vast cultural landscape in combination with what it could teach the consumer of such an offering would benefit the country and its people sits at the very foundation of cultural institutions in the United States.

As illustrated here, art patrons are a crucial part of the American museum landscape of the past and present. The dependence of public institution on private contributions, whether monetary or in kind, is a structure that finds its birth in cultural stewardship in

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum: From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870-1930* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), 3.

⁴⁰ “Picture Excitement”, *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 42.

⁴¹ Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum: From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870-1930* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), 4.

⁴² “Syllabus of the Course for the Training of Curators”, *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 23 (July 1908): 50.

⁴³ Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum: From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870-1930* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), 5.

the latter half of the nineteenth century. The influence single patrons had and continue to have on specific art institutions cannot be understated. In the next two chapters, the case studies will act as evidence to this point.

III. Bertha Palmer and The Art Institute of Chicago

1. Bertha Palmer: Art Collector and Patron

The life of Bertha Palmer, celebrated Gilded Age Chicago art collector and patron, was filled with many accomplishments. Married to wealthy real-estate developer Potter Palmer during a time when gender roles were clearly defined and hardly challenged, we can observe a theme running through her life of seeking to give back to society and the communities she lived in. An advocate for women's rights and land developer in Sarasota Bay, she was an avid art collector, champion of Impressionism in the United States, and early patron of the Art Institute of Chicago. This chapter gives focus to her contributions to the development of the cultural landscape in Chicago in the late nineteenth century, as well as her posthumous impact on the collection of the Art Institute.

Bertha Palmer lived a life of immense privilege. A descendant of three generations of successful businessmen in Kentucky, her family moved to Chicago when she was six years old to take advantage of the expansion of the Windy City. She was uncommonly educated for a woman in her time. Unlike young women with similar background, who were mostly homeschooled by private governesses, Palmer attended St. Xavier's Academy and Dearborn Seminary in Chicago, as well as the Convent of the Visitation in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.⁴⁴ Her marriage to Potter Palmer, dry-goods store owner turned real estate developer and one of Chicago's wealthiest men in his time, would set her up to live a life of extreme wealth and splendor. "The Queen of Chicago,"⁴⁵ as she

⁴⁴ Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *The Jewel of the Gold Coast: Mrs. Potter Palmer's Chicago* (Chicago: Ampersand, Inc., 2009), 14.

⁴⁵ Ishbel Ross, *Silhouette in Diamonds: The Life of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 167.

was nicknamed, became the center of the social elite of Chicago in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

During a time when gender inequality was the enforced norm and women were introduced as their husbands' wives, Bertha Palmer left a mark on her environment in her own right. In all her life's opulence, Bertha Palmer cared deeply for the communities within which she lived and worked hard to contribute to their betterment. She deeply believed that Chicago could be a city of excellence, one that could shine as brightly as Paris or London, and a home worth bragging about. This mindset made her a child of her time, reflecting the historical context explained in the previous chapter. She was part of a generation of Americans who believed it was their duty to dedicate their time and their financial and social capital to the development of the United States and its cities. Bertha Palmer showed the same rigor as her contemporaries and was immensely successful in the projects she chose to pursue.

The idea of private initiative as the force of change is clearly visible in Bertha Palmer. Her engagement with and dedication to bringing together people and resources in order to create an outcome that would sustainably improve the situation she found is a theme that runs throughout her life. When much of Chicago was destroyed in 1871 by the Great Chicago Fire, she gave shelter to "all that could be squeezed in"⁴⁶ and implored a discouraged Potter Palmer to become part of the reconstruction of the city. After Potter received a loan of \$1,700,000 USD⁴⁷, the largest single loan in the United States at the time, he turned to develop much of State Street, which was to become the major

⁴⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁷ According to an inflation calculator, today's equivalent would be about \$38,542,000 USD.

commercial thoroughfare in the rebuilt Chicago.⁴⁸ Palmer's father, Henry Hamilton Honoré, and Potter Palmer were on the forefront of the city's development in the 1870s, so she received first-hand experience on how the concept of public-private partnership was put into action. In her later years, she often commented that it was these early years of their marriage when she developed her own business acumen as she watched and discussed her husband's daily operations with him.⁴⁹

By the 1890s, she had become a household name not just in Chicago, but along the Eastern seaboard, as well. As her philanthropic roles pushed her further into the spotlight and the eyes of the public focused on her, she proved she could achieve her goals with the capital she possessed and the resources her gender allowed. Her appointment as President of the Board of Lady Managers for the World's Columbian Fair represents a moment in Bertha Palmer's life where she reaped the social rewards her marriage to Potter Palmer had afforded her, but more importantly, the rewards of her own efforts. In a way, her involvement in the Fair was a natural result in her life's trajectory, but it was as consequential for her as the Fair was for Chicago.⁵⁰

She took her role as President of the Board of Lady Managers very seriously and deployed all her economic, social, and cultural capital to reach her vision leading up to the opening day. Through her younger sister Ida, she had a connection to the White House in the 1870s, as Ida had married Ulysses H. Grant's son Frederick Dent Grant. This allowed her to build a network she could then activate while she was travelling the European continent in 1891 and 1892. Her mission was to spread the news of the Fair and

⁴⁸ Ishbel Ross, *Silhouette in Diamonds: The Life of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 8-9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 44.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 100-102.

encourage people to contribute paintings, objects, or anything they deemed appropriate.⁵¹ Oftentimes, her progressive ideas would clash with the more conservative royal houses of Europe. Nevertheless, it was her sophistication and “strength of purpose”⁵² that changed even the most stubborn minds. Known for being smart, well spoken, and very persuasive, she “managed to engender greater enthusiasm for this distant enterprise than would otherwise have materialized.”⁵³

This trip to Europe is pivotal for the line of reasoning of this thesis. While Mrs. Palmer’s priority was certainly organizing the Fair and hosting potential contributors, her actions in her leisure time would prove consequential in many other aspects. Under the guidance of her art advisors Sara Tyson Hallowell and the artist Mary Cassatt, the early 1890s would become Bertha Palmer’s most active years as an art collector.

She first started collecting art in the mid to late 1880s, mainly to furnish and decorate the Palmers’ residence, and maintained her collecting practices until she retired to Sarasota, Florida, albeit with less fervor after her husband passed away. In the 1880s she started her art collection by collecting American painters and switched over to Barbizon School artists in 1890/91. she started buying the Impressionists’ work on her trip to Paris in 1891. It is in 1891 and 1892 on her trip Paris that Sara Hallowell first introduces Bertha Palmer to work by the still unknown Impressionist, a turning point for Palmer and her collection.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid, 59-62.

⁵² Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey, *Great Women Collectors* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Limited, 1999), 131.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ishbel Ross, *Silhouette in Diamonds: The Life of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 151.

She had already met Paul Durand-Ruel two years prior in 1889, so the painters' most important dealer was not unfamiliar.⁵⁵ Reports on her acquisitions on trips through Montmartre vary. However large the numbers, it is clear she did not return to Chicago emptyhanded. She purchased between twenty-two and thirty-two works by Monet, as well as several by Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Whistler, and Cassatt, artists who were disregarded by much of the European market.⁵⁶

It was characteristic of Bertha to conform to convention when little was at stake. Thus she acquired a few unexceptional pieces by Corot, Delacroix, and Millet. Yet it was also characteristic of her to redefine convention when it mattered to her. At the time she began to collect art, most of the world considered Impressionism [...] deformed. [...] But Bertha trusted in her own eye and the advisers she hired [...].⁵⁷

These purchases in Paris were only the first of what would become the largest and most important private collection of Impressionist painting in the United States at the time. As much as Palmer believed in the established rules and etiquette of her period, she demonstrates a strong belief in personal vision and individuality over forced conformity. She was already a tastemaker in the likes of fashion and interior design, but her interest in and subsequent active purchasing habits of Impressionist work signal the first step of modern art market establishment in the United States.⁵⁸

Because she bought so much art, people often misrepresent her motivations. She appreciated great artwork and she collected it with fervor, but she was anything but sentimental with her collection. Her mindset was unapologetically capitalist, schooled by

⁵⁵ "Pissarro Paintings and Works on Paper at the Art Institute of Chicago," Art Institute of Chicago, accessed December 2, 2021, https://publications.artic.edu/pissarro/reader/paintingsandpaper/section/1013/1013_anchor.

⁵⁶ Robert Erwin, "Having It All," *The Massachusetts Review* 51, no. 2 (2010): 287-288.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 287.

⁵⁸ Ishbel Ross, *Silhouette in Diamonds: The Life of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 63.

conversations with her husband and observations of his real estate dealings. Oftentimes, artworks would only be in her collection for a short period of time before she sold them in order to fiscally and physically make room for newer acquisitions. We can observe a financing model for her art collection that matches a dealer's. Richard R. Brettell describes it as such in his 1984 article published by the Art Institute of Chicago:

She made many of her purchases, it seems, to upgrade her collection. [...] In other cases, it appears that she was manipulating the market for her own gain. [...] In this way, she probably did as much as any single dealer or collector not only to create the rising prices for Impressionist works but to benefit from that very inflation!⁵⁹

During her most active years collecting art between 1891 and 1894, she came to own about ninety works by Monet.⁶⁰ Most of them were painted in that same time frame, indicating she was purchasing them almost as soon as the artist completed them.

Her acquisition strategy goes beyond making high volume purchases and selling at a profit, however. She is arguably one of the first people to recognize the opportunity and power of purchasing Monet's serial paintings. The most prominent example is her purchase of nine paintings of the artist's infamous Haystack series, one of which sold for \$110,747,000 USD including buyer's premium at Sotheby's New York in 2019.⁶¹ Her collection also included four Poplar paintings, three of the Rouen Cathedral, and three of the series devoted to mornings on the Seine.⁶²

⁵⁹ Richard R. Brettell, "Monet's Haystacks Reconsidered." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 11, no. 1 (1984): 19.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Claude Monet (1840-1926): Meules (1890)", Artprice, accessed October 24, 2021, <https://www-artprice-com.ezproxy.sothebysinstitute.com/artist/20093/claude-monet/painting/18514698/meules>.

⁶² Richard R. Brettell, "Monet's Haystacks Reconsidered." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 11, no. 1 (1984): 19.

The recent Art Institute of Chicago Monet and Chicago exhibition highlighted three Monet collectors from Chicago – Bertha Palmer, the Ryersons and Coburns – with Bertha Palmer front and center. It showed how important Chicago was for the development of a market in the US for Impressionists and highlighted the patrons who brought them to the city.⁶³ The relationship between Durand-Ruel and American collectors such as Bertha Palmer played a big part of the expansion of the market for the artists under Durand-Ruel’s wing. The direct line from the French dealer to American collectors willing to spend money on artists European collectors did not even recognize as such, has proven to be one of the reasons Impressionist work became as highly regarded as it is.⁶⁴

Throughout her life, Bertha Palmer pushed the boundaries of what societal power structures allowed women to accomplish. Much of the privilege she enjoyed early on certainly came from her marriage to Potter. The wealth and social stature he brought into the partnership opened doors that would otherwise have remained shut. Economic capital not only awarded the holder respect from the business community, it also brought about the power to affect change in a chosen area. For Potter Palmer this area was city planning and infrastructure through his real estate business. For Bertha Palmer, at least in her early years of marriage, this meant freedom to live a life of comfort, and influencing the social circles around her. The role of President of the Board of Lady Managers for the World’s Columbian Exposition specifically, was not just a role of prestige, but one that Bertha Palmer used effectively to impact the Fair as a whole and highlight the work of women all around the globe. In later years, the Palmers’ wealth allowed her to affect change in

⁶³ “Monet and Chicago,” Art Institute of Chicago, accessed October 29, 2021, <https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/9036/monet-and-chicago>.

⁶⁴ Jennifer A. Thompson, “Durand-Ruel in America”, in *Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market*, ed. Sylvie Patry (London, UK: National Gallery Company Limited, 2015), 151.

the fight for women's worker rights, create markets for then unknown artists, and to develop land in Sarasota, Florida.

Economic capital and, more importantly, the display of it, was a language most recognized. As illustrated in the first chapter, economic capital rarely stands as a singular entity, though. Along with cultural capital and social capital, these three columns represent a simplified model of a person's interaction with society. In the case of Bertha Palmer, she was keenly aware of her position not just as a highly educated woman with a vast art collection, but also as someone with connections that reached as far as the White House and across the Atlantic. Maximizing her social and cultural capital in every step of her life allowed her to leave the mold the Victorian Era reserved for her. The combination of her capital, her awareness of it, and the way she deployed it that allowed her to become a fierce agent of change.

2. *The Potter Palmer Collection: Bertha Palmer's Bequest to the Art Institute of Chicago*

Bertha Palmer cultivated a relationship with the Art Institute of Chicago throughout her entire life. She sometimes gave lectures at the Institute and her husband Potter Palmer was an early supporter and member of the board of the Chicago Academy of Design before the institution officially became the Art Institute of Chicago.⁶⁵ Through her connections garnered during the Fair and her relationships with members of the Board of Trustees, she suggested to the Institute's president Charles L. Hutchinson – in an explicit

⁶⁵ Ishbel Ross, *Silhouette in Diamonds: The Life of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 159.

letter – that one of her children, Honoré, might be appointed to the board.⁶⁶ While she herself did not hold a leadership position on the Board of Trustees, both she and her family had a close relationship to the institution and demonstrated a vested interest in its success. After Bertha Palmer’s death, her son Potter Palmer, Jr. joined the Board of Trustees in 1920 and served as its President from 1924-1943.⁶⁷

Bertha Palmer made two monetary bequests, valued at \$100,000 and \$400,000 USD respectively, to the Art Institute of Chicago, which were to be used to purchase artworks from her collection. The works in question were “chosen and evaluated by the museum’s trustees, including her sons, Honoré Palmer and Potter Palmer, Jr.”⁶⁸ who themselves contributed an additional thirty-two paintings and pastels.⁶⁹ The only restriction she set was that the works had to be exhibited in a special gallery.⁷⁰

Her bequest undoubtedly left a mark on the institution and its development. It is a perfect example of how a patron leveraging their capital led to a donation that to this day presents a significant and celebrated part of the receiving institution’s collection. The Art Institute benefitted immensely, not only in terms of the bequest’s foundational nature, but also in institutional reputation. Bertha and Potter Palmer are included in the list of most significant donors of the institution, a form of cultural capital which multiplied itself in their children. The Art Institute thus claimed the Palmers – already honored and celebrated citizens – as their own.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 158.

⁶⁷ Art Institute of Chicago: Forty-sixth Annual Report for the Year 1924, 1924, 2.

⁶⁸ “Pissarro Paintings and Works on Paper at the Art Institute of Chicago,” accessed December 2, 2021, https://publications.artic.edu/pissarro/reader/paintingsandpaper/section/1013/1013_anchor.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Art Institute of Chicago: Fortieth Annual Report for the Year 1918, 1918, 18.

The question this thesis is trying to answer is how private patronage impacts institutional identity-building, more specifically which role individual donors have had and continue to have in this development. Bertha Palmer's bequest, fifty-one paintings by the most notable mostly French artists in their respective movement was then, and would be now, considered a major gift.

Bertha Palmer's bequest was named *The Potter Palmer Collection* and continues to carry this name. Its impact on the museum is twofold. The primary impact was on the museum's collection itself. Expanding the collection, which started primarily with plaster casts of famous Ancient Greek and Roman statues as well as mismatched period rooms, to include canonically significant artwork represents a moment of institutional development in the most obvious way. In the announcement of the *Potter Palmer Collection* in the May 1922 Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago, rather than providing detail about the monetary size of the bequest, the Bulletin steers the readers' focus toward the bequest's significance within art historical canon: "In addition to the impressionist group, the romanticists and the Barbizon men, who represented the high water mark of painting in the early part of the century, are to be studied here from superb examples, as well as the men at the end of the century, such as Cazin, Besnard, and Puvis de Chavannes [...]."⁷¹

The connection to France was a welcome one, especially in the American Midwest.⁷² By the 1920s, the reservations about Impressionism and questions whether it would become a valid art movement, which were significant when Bertha Palmer made her first

⁷¹ Ibid, 38.

⁷² "The Potter Palmer Collection of Paintings," *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* (1907-1951) 16, no. 3 (May 1922): 37.

purchases in Paris about thirty years prior, had faded. The gift was widely celebrated. By placing the works within the context of the existing collection of French paintings in the institution, the writers chose to refer to the original educational mission of the museum. This bequest allowed the museum to broaden its collection to include artists such as Monet, Pissarro, and Cazin, so that the public might have even better access and broader exposure to more significant works of art, and thus greater depth of cultural enrichment.⁷³

Moreover, we see a clear development within the institution. The French paintings not only provide important opportunity for cultural literacy and scholarship of French art history, they also provide understanding of the development of art in the United States, as “the evolution of art in America is unintelligible without an understanding of the artistic achievements of the older nation.”⁷⁴ While American museums were not built to be imitations of European institutions, there was an understanding in the founding years that it would take time to facilitate conversations about art history without the constant undertone of European institutions. In that sense, these paintings provide context, rather than just content.⁷⁵

In addition to the primary impact on the collection itself, the second aspect through which the gift had an impact on the Art Institute, is that it gave the institution a measure of institutional legitimacy that few other gifts could rival. In a moment of striving to own and exhibit more original works of art, the *Potter Palmer Collection* turned the Art Institute of Chicago into the museum with one of the most important holdings of French

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 37.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Impressionism in the United States at the time.⁷⁶ It sent a signal to the public that the museum had grown into an institution that owned, exhibited, and cared for art of international stature, and that it grew beyond its original holdings of plaster casts. With this bequest, the Art Institute communicated its importance as an art institution and added another layer of authority within the landscape of cultural institutions. To this day, the paintings of the *Potter Palmer Collection* are some of the prize works of the institution.⁷⁷ The Collection set them up to attract more visitors, more educators, and more donors, becoming a thriving, world-class institution in the twenty-first century.

The example of Bertha Palmer and her connection to the arts shows an interesting dichotomy. There is an astute awareness on her side of the success of private-public partnerships in cultural endeavors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For Chicago specifically, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition serves as an excellent example of the private sector and government collaborating on a project that lastingly altered the city. Bertha Palmer herself was deeply involved and responsible for the success of the Fair. Simultaneously, it was also the time of unregulated capitalism and aggregation of massive individual wealth centralized in a small group of people. Bertha and Potter Palmer embody this phenomenon. Income inequality, gender equality, and civil rights were conversations in which Bertha Palmer was partly engaged, but she also had the privilege to ignore them. Her life and her leadership exhibit a compelling tension between individual success, the privileges it grants, and the desires to serve public interest, while simultaneously reaping benefits for herself, her family, and the public.

⁷⁶ "Pissarro Paintings and Works on Paper at the Art Institute of Chicago," Art Institute of Chicago, accessed December 2, 2021, https://publications.artic.edu/pissarro/reader/paintingsandpaper/section/1013/1013_anchor.

⁷⁷ Robert Erwin, "Having It All," *The Massachusetts Review* 51, no. 2 (2010): 288.

IV. Anna Wintour and The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

As this thesis turns to the second case study, the focus will be on the present museum landscape, more specifically the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Roughly a century after the founding years upon which the previous section focused, the analysis of the following pages will consider the role of patronage in museums in modern times.

1. The Financial Structure of the American Museum Today

The second chapter outlined the history of cultural institutions in the United States and provided insight into the founding and origins of museums in America. In today's museum landscape, the public-private partnerships that, since their inception, characterized American museums founded in the late nineteenth century continues to hold true. However, the structures of this partnership, specifically the donor-institution-relationship, have developed. These matured financial models most commonly found in modern art museum in the United States will be the focus of this section.

Whether public or private, most museums in the United States are nonprofit organizations with a 501(c)3 tax status. The Smithsonian Institution and National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. are notable exceptions as they are funded by the federal government. As charitable organizations with educational purposes, the biggest advantage this tax status offers is the exemption from corporate income tax as well as the

eligibility to receive tax-deductible contributions.⁷⁸ This does not mean, however, that museums are completely cut off from municipal funding. Rather, it sets up the four pillars of museum funding – government grants, private donations, earned revenue and investment income.⁷⁹ This structure positions the American public museum at a cross-section between commercial enterprise and public entity.

Although art museums are a vital part of our culture, financially they are relatively neglected stepchildren of our affluent economy. As nonprofit institutions, they lack both the ability to raise financial resources in the ways that profit-making businesses can and the substantial public funding of government activities.⁸⁰

Government support can come from all levels, although the majority comes from the state and local level. This pillar used to make up a generous part of museum funding but has decreased significantly over the last few decades even while institutions keep growing. In 1989, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for example, noted twenty percent of funding coming from the city of New York, whereas in 2021 it was just about seven percent.^{81,82} Neoliberal fiscal policies have on the one hand shrunk government funding. On the other hand, the same neoliberal doctrine has contributed to the strong economic

⁷⁸ “Exemption Requirements – 501(c)(3) Organizations, Internal Revenue Service, accessed September 30, 2021, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/exemption-requirements-501c3-organizations>.

⁷⁹ Ford B. Well, “How Are Museums Supported Financially in the U.S?,” American Association of Museums, accessed September 30, 2021, https://static.america.gov/uploads/sites/8/2016/03/You-Asked-Series_How-Are-Museums-Supported-Financially-in-the-US_English_Lo-Res_508.pdf.

⁸⁰ Martin Feldstein, *The Economics of Art Museums* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.

⁸¹ “Annual Report for the Year”, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed December 1, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/-/media/files/about-the-met/annual-reports/2020-2021/annual-report-2020-21.pdf>.

⁸² Part of that decline can be attributed to inflation and monetary value of government contributions remaining the same.

position of the wealthiest citizens, “and so it is to them that art museums increasingly turn.”⁸³

The differential has, in part, been covered with an increase in funding through the private sector. Corporate sponsorship, as well as donations from individuals, charities, and philanthropic entities fall under this umbrella. Growing development departments, innovative fundraising methods, and powerful trustees, to name a few, are indicators of this trend.⁸⁴ In 1869, a year before its official incorporation, the Board of Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum consisted of fifty people before that number was increased to 116 shortly after.⁸⁵ Now, as the institution has grown, the Board is a diversified, structured organization in its own merit with several subunits.⁸⁶

Earned revenue, the third pillar, is income derived “directly from museum exhibitions, programs, retail sales or rentals,”⁸⁷ as well as ticket sales. The share is different for each institution. On average, earned revenue makes up about a quarter of a museum’s funding.⁸⁸

The last pillar of museum funding is investment income. Any institution with an endowment generates income from investment returns. The endowments are usually managed by a board of trustee committee, made up of finance professionals, in cooperation with the finance department in order to “maximize returns on these without

⁸³ John Zarobell, ed., “Museum Funding: Who Shapes Institutions?,” in *Art and the Global Economy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-40.

⁸⁵ Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 1971, 1871, 3.

⁸⁶ The Metropolitan Museum of Art Board of Trustees, last modified October 1, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/-/media/files/about-the-met/annual-reports/2019-2020/the-board-of-trustees-annual-report-2019-20.pdf?la=en&hash=14C5882DD2DEF576FB0D7712CD3FB48F>

⁸⁷ Ford B. Well, “How Are Museums Supported Financially in the U.S?,” American Association of Museums, accessed September 30, 2021, https://static.america.gov/uploads/sites/8/2016/03/You-Asked-Series_How-Are-Museums-Supported-Financially-in-the-US_English_Lo-Res_508.pdf.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

jeopardizing core funds.”⁸⁹ This source of funding heavily depends on the health of the financial world. Shocks such as the 2008 recession or the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are unforeseen challenges to which museums are vulnerable.

Just as art museums themselves have experienced a process of professionalization since their founding years, financial models of cultural institutions have also become more sophisticated.

2. The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

i. The Costume Institute: Origins

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded on April 13, 1870, and has since then grown into one of the biggest and most significant art institutions in the world. Its collection has grown exponentially and has become one of the most extensive museum collections globally. Among its seventeen curatorial departments, it is the home to the Costume Institute which owns “more than thirty-three thousand objects [representing] seven centuries of fashionable dress and accessories for men, women, and children, from the fifteenth century to the present.”⁹⁰

The Costume Institute’s origin and position within the Met is unique. Founded in 1937 as the Museum of Costume Art by Irene Lewisohn, the independent entity housed the Neighborhood Playhouse founder’s amassed collection of costume and set design, as well as her library on acting and theater production. In 1944, after Irene Lewisohn’s death,

⁸⁹ John Zarobell, ed., “Museum Funding: Who Shapes Institutions?,” in *Art and the Global Economy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 40.

⁹⁰ “The Costume Institute”, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed October 6, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/the-costume-institute>.

with the involvement of the fashion industry, it joined the Metropolitan Museum and was named the Costume Institute in 1946.⁹¹ In 1959, it became an independent curatorial department. At the time of the merger, the responsible parties did not implement an integrated financing policy, and, to this day, it remains the only curatorial department that must finance itself.⁹²

In 2009, the Brooklyn Museum transferred its collection of costume to the Costume Institute. The Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art⁹³ includes the most comprehensive collection of American designer Charles James' objects and archival material, as well as an archive of the most relevant fashion from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century of the United States.⁹⁴ As a result of this union, the Costume Institute now houses "the largest and most comprehensive costume collection in the world, offering an unrivaled timeline of representative fashionable Western dress."⁹⁵

In its most recent expansion in 2014, the reconfigured 5,000-square-foot exhibition space was introduced as the Anna Wintour Costume Center, comprising of the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Gallery, the Carl and Iris Barrel Apfel Gallery, a behind-the-scenes conservation laboratory with an integrated study and storage facility, as well as the Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library.⁹⁶

⁹¹ "History of the Department," The Costume Institute, accessed Nov 3, 2021,

<https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/the-costume-institute>.

⁹² Arielle Dorlester, Celia Hartmann and Julie Le, "Costume Institute Records, 1937-2008", The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives (2017), 6.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

ii. The Costume Institute: A Unique Funding Structure

Due to its unique history and position within the museum, the department does not rely on the museum to provide financing for department operations. Since its inception, a large fundraising gala, that soon came to be known as The Costume Institute Benefit, constituted the most significant revenue source for the Costume Institute. This creates an interesting dynamic between the department and the organizers and lead sponsors of the event, Vogue. This will be subject to further investigation in a later part of this chapter.

The Gala's first iteration was organized in 1948 by Eleanor Lambert, a fashion publicist and founder of New York City Fashion Week. The Costume Institute website describes it as such: "The brainchild of publicity doyenne Eleanor Lambert, the benefit was introduced in 1948 as a midnight supper and dubbed "The Party of the Year"."⁹⁷ In her years as organizer, the Benefit was conceptualized mostly in the same fashion as any of the other art fundraising events in the city, namely a dinner held at either the Waldorf Astoria Hotel or the Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center. The guest list included notable names of New York's social elite.⁹⁸ In 1960, the Gala was held at the museum for the first time, "after which it became much more formal and central to the New York social scene."⁹⁹

In 1972, after leaving her position as editor-in-chief at Vogue, Diana Vreeland became Special Consultant to The Costume Institute and continued in that role until her death in

⁹⁷ "History of the Department," The Costume Institute, accessed Nov 3, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/the-costume-institute>.

⁹⁸ Arielle Dorlester, Celia Hartmann and Julie Le, "Costume Institute Records, 1937-2008", The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives (2017), 246.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

1989. During her tenure as consultant, the Gala started evolving from a traditional fundraising event to a more glamorous affair. This development was a result of three meaningful decisions.

The first decision was to expand the guest list to include popular personalities of the arts and culture, fashion, politics, and theater scene. Guests such as Andy Warhol, Liza Minelli, and Bianca Jagger helped shine a light on Gala and bring public attention to the event. Intermixing the standard roster of New York City's patron elite with pop-culture figures altered the public's perception of the event. The celebrity presence added a sense of exclusivity to an event that in its essence was still a traditional fundraiser.

The second crucial decision was to present the Gala under a specific theme. The first time this concept was introduced was in 1973, when the theme of the Gala was *The World of Balenciaga*.¹⁰⁰ This strategic move further set apart the Benefit from other fundraising events in the city and contributed to the event becoming more attractive to possible donors. The more traction the Gala gained, the more exclusivity it radiated, the more these developments led to the iteration we can observe today.

The third decision was to create a position of co-chair. That in itself is not unusual, however her use of that position is. When Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was named co-chair in 1977 and 1978, her immense popularity brought a kind of visibility to the Gala never seen before. Patricia Taylor Buckley, a leading player in Manhattan's social and patronage scene, would occupy that seat from 1979 until 1994.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Harold Koda and Richard Martin, *Diana Vreeland: Immoderate Style*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993), 15.

¹⁰¹ "History of the Department," The Costume Institute, accessed Nov 3, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/the-costume-institute>.

With the implementation of these changes, Diana Vreeland realized she had the ability to significantly alter the system of fundraising in the niche she carved out for herself. In her capacity as Special Consultant to the Costume Institute, she deployed her expertise and contact list from her time as editor-in-chief at *Vogue* to create a unique experience for the event's attendees. She leveraged her social and cultural capital in order to bring together the world of fashion with the world of art and created a formula that shows how powerful such connections can be.

Anna Wintour first got involved with the event in 1995. Since then, she has transformed the Gala from Diana Vreeland's innovative iteration to the fashion spectacle it is today. Her role and her contributions are the subject of the following pages.

3. Anna Wintour and The Costume Institute

i. Anna Wintour: The Most Powerful Woman in Fashion

The daughter of Charles Wintour, Editor of the *London Evening Standard*, Anna Wintour was raised with the world of journalism as a core part of her upbringing. This formative experience heavily informed her choices and trajectory of her career. From the moment she became editor-in-chief at *American Vogue* in 1988, she transformed the then struggling magazine to fit her vision of a successful fashion magazine for the contemporary woman. Moreover, she has expanded her influence within the fashion industry and beyond. Often referred to as “the most powerful woman in fashion,”¹⁰² Anna

¹⁰² David Weiss, “That’s Part of What We Do: The Performative Power of *Vogue*’s Anna Wintour,” *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 1.

Wintour holds many roles that far supersede the traditional position of a magazine editor. Rather than merely reporting on the fashion industry and its creations, she has positioned herself to be at the heart of the industry. This chapter will demonstrate just how far her reach goes and how strongly her influence is felt.

Over the span of her career, Wintour has expanded her influence within the fashion industry in a manner where she can oversee its entirety. First, she makes use of her immense network to further careers of people she deems worthy of her time and support. In his 2014 paper on Anna Wintour's influence on the fashion industry, the author David Weiss refers to Wintour being "Fairy Godmother – and Kingmaker."¹⁰³ He describes Wintour as actively and deliberately choosing people to champion and careers to further. The most prominent example is John Galliano, whose career trajectory can be highly attributed to Wintour's intervention. When he was a young and struggling designer, Vogue included his collection in the magazine, and introduced him to Dior and later the LVMH luxury conglomerate.¹⁰⁴ Galliano has benefitted greatly from Wintour acting as a powerbroker and mentor of his career.

John Galliano's career is an example of Wintour's support of a single designer in her early days at Vogue. She has since "institutionalized the practice"¹⁰⁵ through the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund, which allows Wintour to lend her hand to new designers. This support comes in various forms, such as cash and Wintour using her network to foster relationships between young designers and established brands. This part especially has become a core part of the Fund and makes it possible for Wintour to deploy her influence

¹⁰³ Ibid, 10

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 10, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 10-11.

in the very early stages of designers' careers. It allows her to impact the development of brands, collections, and hierarchies within the big designer houses. This creates a ripple effect where her power benefits the designer, the brand, and the industry as a whole. By placing up-an-coming designers with well-established brands, her vision of the future of the fashion industry indirectly becomes true. She herself has stated in an interview with the UK's Telegraph that "through the creation of the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund, we've changed the landscape of American fashion."¹⁰⁶

Second, Wintour acts as consultant to established designers. She often gets invited to exclusive designer previews where she offers her opinion on fabric choices, color schemes, and garment cuts. Her opinion matters so much that her visits are expected, somewhat feared, mostly appreciated, but can change the outcome of a collection or a specific design. These visits are a part of Wintour's routine in order to make sure her "suggestions for revision"¹⁰⁷ are heard clearly. Her eye has become one of the most important authorities to please.

Third, she gets called upon in times of trouble. When a specific Prada design could not demonstrate the desired sale numbers at their retail locations, Neiman-Marcus CEO Burton Tansky reached out and asked whether Wintour could intervene. Consequently, Prada reconsidered the garment's design and came up with a different version.¹⁰⁸ Later in the conversation, Tansky also asked her whether she could also urge Prada to speed up their deliveries of merchandise, to which she replied, "What would you like me to do?"

¹⁰⁶ "Anna Wintour Talks to The Telegraph at New York Fashion Week", YouTube, uploaded September 14, 2010, accessed December 1, 2021, 0:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NPno0EBVS8>.

¹⁰⁷ David Weiss, "That's Part of What We Do: The Performative Power of *Vogue's* Anna Wintour," *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

Rent a truck?”¹⁰⁹ This type of intervention would be more than uncommon in any other industry.

Over the last three decades, she has slowly but forcefully changed how the fashion industry operates and turned it into an entity resembling that of a centralized state with her at the very center overseeing every process. By making sure every decision has to have her direct or indirect approval, she gets to govern the entire industry. Even if a more direct route would be more convenient, Anna Wintour effectively has the final say. While she insists her words are advice rather than commands, the fact that she can exert this kind of power over some of the biggest houses in the fashion industry is a telling indicator of how far her influence reaches.¹¹⁰

The actions mentioned above illustrate that she does not see herself as someone who comments on the fashion industry from the outside. Often stating that “fashion’s my job,”¹¹¹ it is clear how she sees herself as both a person within the industry and Vogue’s editor-in-chief. By creating this insider-position for herself, the magazine has become just one of the many outlets of her personal vision. David Weiss puts it as follows: “In addition to putting out a magazine every month, Wintour acts as a co-creator of fashion, serving as design and retail consultant, industry publicist and promoter, and talent scout.”¹¹² From placing non-established designers in big houses and fostering their careers through mentorship and guidance, to consulting established designers on collection choices and hiring processes, her decisions act as a stern guide along every

¹⁰⁹ *The September Issue*, directed by R. J. Cutler (California: Lionsgate Films, 2009).

¹¹⁰ David Weiss, “That’s Part of What We Do: The Performative Power of *Vogue*’s Anna Wintour,” *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 13.

¹¹¹ Ingrid Sischy, “Wintour Front Row And Centered: A Conversation With Vogue’s Fast-Moving, Fast-Thinking, Fast-Knowing Editor,” *Interview* (December 1993), 99.

¹¹² David Weiss, “That’s Part of What We Do: The Performative Power of *Vogue*’s Anna Wintour,” *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 18.

step. Her presence, just as her absence, is felt immensely. She has deliberately cultivated her own position as principal agent of the fashion industry. Under the discipline of her leadership, she has transformed the magazine as well as the industry as a whole. From the designer's studio to the museum, Anna Wintour ensures her words are heard.

ii. Anna Wintour and the Met Gala

Since the inception of the Costume Institute, its Gala has constituted one of its most significant revenue producing events, as outlined earlier. Under the leadership of Anna Wintour as the principal agent for Vogue, it has taken on new dimensions. Most of the accounting and event details remain well guarded by the institution, and with little to no analytical literature available, the analysis of the Gala must rely on newspaper articles, documentaries, and the Met's own records, which are biased sources by nature.

Considering the event through the lens outlined in this thesis will establish a context that will allow us to understand the various effects of the Gala on the department.

In the 2016 documentary *The First Monday in May*¹¹³, the film crew followed Anna Wintour, Andrew Bolton, who is the Costume Institute's Wendy Yu Curator in Charge, and their respective teams during the preparation of the 2015 Gala and the China:

Through the Looking Glass exhibition opening. It granted access into the months-long preparation process for the evening and provided insight into the working relationship between the two entities.

¹¹³ *The First Monday in May*, directed by Andrew Rossi (New York: Magnolia Pictures, 2016).

The partnership between Vogue and the Costume Institute is not necessarily unique. Corporate sponsorship is a well-established pillar within museum development. The Metropolitan Museum of Art itself has a long list of donators from the business community and employs an entire department dedicated to cultivating these relationships.¹¹⁴ What makes the partnership between the Costume Institute and Vogue stand out is the amount of departmental involvement and influence Vogue and Anna Wintour as its agent receive and execute. The fact that the Met Gala is responsible for raising most of the entire year's funding for the Costume Institute certainly plays into the relationship dynamic. This type of responsibility and power cannot be found in traditional stewardship.

During the early days of the Gala, the relationship between the Met and the Gala was rather one-sided, where the museum benefitted most from the cooperation. Over the years, as it outgrew its traditional fundraising mold and public perception of the event began to change, it slowly progressed toward a more balanced alliance. From the moment Anna Wintour decided on Vogue's involvement, the relationship between the fundraiser and the museum evolved further and entered a new stage in its development. It is now almost symbiotic where both parties contribute to reaching their respective goals.

The Costume Institute has benefitted immensely from the relationship with Vogue. First, receiving funding every year enables the staff to run a successful curatorial department. The Met Gala is one of the most successful fundraising events for a singular curatorial department in the United States and has become more successful financially as

¹¹⁴ "The Staff," Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified July 1, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/-/media/files/about-the-met/annual-reports/2019-2020/the-staff-annual-report-2019-20.pdf?la=en&hash=EC9C8C287404BCE55638857D665AA82B>.

time has passed. In 2000, the Costume Institute Benefit raised about three million dollars.¹¹⁵ Ten years later in 2009, that number had jumped to nine million.¹¹⁶ Another ten years later, it reached fifteen million dollars.¹¹⁷ According to the Met's member newsletter from September 30, 2021, the 2021 Gala was its most successful iteration yet, despite the slow economic recovery from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹⁸ Vanessa Friedman, Fashion Director and Chief Fashion Critic for the New York Times, who has been covering the Met Gala for a few years, remarks in her article on the 2019 Gala: "For some context, that same year the New York City Ballet gala raised just over \$2.3 million."¹¹⁹ The disproportionate scale between the two events goes to show just how effective a fundraising tool the Met Gala has become.

Part of the reason for the exponential growth of revenue generated by the Gala can be traced to raised ticket and table prices. In 2000, an entire table cost \$50,000 USD.¹²⁰ In 2015, attendees were to pay \$25,000 USD for an individual ticket and \$175,000 USD for a table of ten.¹²¹ In 2021, a ticket was \$35,000 USD and a table between \$200,000 and \$300,000 USD.¹²²

¹¹⁵ *Boss Women: Anna Wintour*, directed by Christine Hall (London, UK: British Broadcasting Company, 2000).

¹¹⁶ "Game Changers: Anna Wintour," YouTube, accessed November 30, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ma_03FFSQs.

¹¹⁷ Vanessa Friedman, "Everything You Need to Know About the Met Gala 2021," New York Times, September 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/10/style/met-gala-vogue-american-fashion.html>.

¹¹⁸ Max Hollein, Metropolitan Museum of Art Membership Newsletter, September 30, 2021.

¹¹⁹ Vanessa Friedman, "Everything You Need to Know About the Met Gala 2021," New York Times, September 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/10/style/met-gala-vogue-american-fashion.html>.

¹²⁰ *Boss Women: Anna Wintour*, directed by Christine Hall (London, UK: British Broadcasting Company, 2000).

¹²¹ Vanessa Friedman, "It's Called the Met Gala, but It's Definitely Anna Wintour's Party," New York Times, May 2, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/03/style/its-called-the-met-gala-but-its-definitely-anna-wintours-party.html>.

¹²² Annie Karni, "A.O.C.'s Met Gala Dress Triggered Strong Reactions," New York Times, September 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/15/style/aoc-met-gala-dress.html>.

Second, the position of the department within the broader landscape of the Metropolitan Museum of Art has undoubtedly changed because of the success of the Gala. Beyond just funding for the department, it communicates a right to take up space when there is still much debate around the presence of fashion in museums. The 2014 expansion and rebranding of the exhibition space, as well as the installation of the Costume Institute's exhibition in galleries outside its own galleries is physical evidence of this development.

Third, receiving funding on that level has allowed the department to create increasingly more ambitious exhibitions over the years. The Costume Institute's exhibitions have become so successful in terms of visitor numbers and reception, that they are now used as a major public relations tool for the Metropolitan Museum of Art to attract more visitors to the museum. Even though many critics still consider the department as niche or inappropriate¹²³, it has developed into a major player in terms of institutional visibility. In addition, being the curator of the five most visited Costume Institute exhibitions, Andrew Bolton has emerged as a star curator.¹²⁴

For Wintour, Vogue's involvement with the Costume Institute parallels and supports her aspirations of bringing attention to fashion as an artform. Supporting the growth of a department allows her to influence the perception of the fashion industry and bridge attention to fashion beyond its commercial enterprise. Throughout her career, she has always worked to cultivate the presence of fashion outside the borders of its own

¹²³ Sometimes works are shown that are still available for purchase by the respective designers, which is a central element of discomfort.

¹²⁴ *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* attracted more than 1.65 million visitors to the Met's different locations in 2018. The other four most successful exhibitions curated by Andrew Bolton include *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, *China: Through the Looking Glass*, *Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology*, and *Camp: Notes on Fashion*.

industry. Presenting fashion and its history in a setting that allows greater accessibility than high-end designer retail stores, offers her a broad platform to achieve that goal. Exhibitions at the Costume Institute are therefore a vehicle to involve the public and bring more eyes to the fashion industry, specifically within the context of one of the most celebrated collections of art spanning millennia.

More than positioning herself at the heart of fashion as described in the chapter above, Anna Wintour has positioned herself as a broker between multiple industries. She herself has become an intersection between journalism, the fashion industry, and arts and culture, and intertwines within them music, sports, politics, and celebrity in a unique combination. By connecting to these industries, she further supports her own, for the leaders in those industries are the most valuable consumers of fashion due to the exposure they offer. As an agent of this intersection, she has created a powerful system of her own in which her capital knows few limits. Due to her unique position, Wintour has indirectly ensured that the growth of the Gala and the relationships fostered through the event carry over to benefit more than just Vogue and the Costume Institute.

With Anna Wintour at its center and acting as an agent between the industry and the world of cultural institutions, the Gala has benefitted one, fashion brands, two, the celebrity attendees, and three, Vogue and by extension, the press. Brands can purchase tickets for entire tables at the event and therefore ensure their designs are represented by celebrities on the red carpet, which is the only aspect of the evening that is visible to the public. Celebrities can be seen supporting a philanthropic cause, or even making a statement with their wardrobe. This oftentimes translates to their fanbase expanding. The

press corps reporting on the event benefits from and actively contributes to the sensationalism surrounding the Met Gala.

Just as she oversees every decision taken within Vogue, Wintour deploys her infamously strict management style at the Met Gala and everything surrounding the event. Apart from curatorial agency within the Costume Institute, she brokers partnerships between designers and celebrities attending the Gala and therefore controls the social makeup of the attendees. The guest list and seating arrangements are under her strict supervision. She has implemented a rule of only allowing a restricted number of journalists at the event. This rule extends to social media for all attendees.

Over the last twenty-six years, Vogue and the Costume Institute have nurtured this connection as it has benefitted both sides immensely. As the relationship between Vogue and the Costume Institute has matured, it demonstrates the continuation of the effectiveness and importance of public-private partnerships, not only to support cultural institutions financially, but also to further engage the public in these institutions.

V. The Past and the Present: Comparison and Analysis

Comparing these two case studies, Bertha Palmer and the Met Gala, does not seem intuitive at first. They are separated by a century and sit on opposite ends of the fundraising spectrum. Bertha Palmer's bequest was a one-time donation as part of settling her estate that followed a lifelong involvement with the institution, while the Met Gala is a yearly reoccurring fundraising event.

Their respective objectives are different, as well. Early museum patrons were, as highlighted in the second chapter, committed to building institutions with the intention of building a country and strengthening cultural identity within. While the project of rebuilding the nation might not have been as present for Bertha Palmer in 1918 as it was when she was a young woman, she is still a child of her time and a product of her lived experiences. In other words, bequeathing part of her art collection to the Art Institute of Chicago culminates a lifelong involvement and dedication to impact her community. Whichever project she tackled, the foundational principle always focused on the betterment of her community, a legacy she passed on to her descendants.

By comparison, the kind of support the Costume Institute receives from the Gala works on a completely different level. It is an event designed with the sole purpose of raising funds for the department. Being able to make the Costume Institute's departmental footprint larger within the museum and expand in physical space implies that rather than institution-building, the Met Gala is department-building and expands on public exposure of the platform it generates. Whereas the Costume Institute's exhibitions did not carry much weight in the past, they are now an integral part of attracting visitors

to the museum. They have a presence that is hard to ignore and have transcended the boundaries of typical conversation surrounding museum exhibitions.

These two case studies, however, are directly related if one focuses on how they function as agents of institutional support. Both Palmer and Wintour, have chosen to direct their capital toward the respective institutions to achieve their respective goals. No individual exists in a void, all hold capital of sorts, and are able to impact their communities. The determining factor for how individuals and their respective impact differ is the manner in which capital is deployed, and how both the capital and its wielder is perceived.

One of the reasons Bertha Palmer's bequest to the Art institute of Chicago stands out among similar donations of the time is that the Palmer name was attached to it. Upon her marriage to Potter Palmer, Bertha Palmer also gained in symbolic power. She leveraged this symbolic power which propelled her into spaces where she could leverage that perception in order to accomplish her vision. During the later years of her life, she continued to pursue activities and commitments in spaces in which the possession of capital was respected and, as a result, multiplied.

It is not unusual to donate paintings to art institutions as part for tax benefits. On the contrary, it is common practice for wealthy collectors to include museum departments in estate planning. Of course, the bequest had major implications for the Art Institute of Chicago and the future of its collecting practice. As stated in previous chapters, its size and content gave direction to the museum while also solidifying its position among its sister cultural institutions. But receiving a donation from Bertha Palmer, former President of the Board Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Fair and forceful agent of change

for the city of Chicago, was noteworthy. The Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago gave expression to this significance in the two pages dedicated to the gift, which discussed the paintings and the gift's overarching contribution to the museum.¹²⁵ It was not a single action or a single use of her capital that Bertha Palmer took to leave a mark, or that worked toward the museum's benefit, but it was the accumulation of her various forms of capital over the span of her lifetime, combined with the content of the donation, that brought about its impact.

In the case of the Met Gala, we can observe a different structure. All types of capital are used, but on different levels for different purposes. In a space where the demonstration of capital is respected and welcomed, we can observe a cross section of different industries capitalizing on each other's presence. On the one hand, there is Anna Wintour. She uses her social capital to engage designers, celebrities, musicians, and other notable personalities to bring them together at the Gala. She calls upon the industry connections she has cultivated over the span of her career which in turn recognize the cultural capital of her and her as an agent for Vogue. By brokering her relationships in this manner, she creates more incentives for attendees.

On the other hand, there are the attendees of the Gala who come with massive economic and social capital, and bringing them to the Gala is the point of the entire event. The Gala does not exist without the fundraising element. A smart incentive structure deployed by Wintour, the opportunity for attendees to exchange economic capital for cultural capital, culminates in a boost for departmental legitimacy for the Costume Institute. The more money the Gala raises, the better the department can support its

¹²⁵ "The Potter Palmer Collection of Paintings," *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* (1907-1951) 16, no. 3 (May 1922): 37-38.

operations and acquisitions, the more effectively it can function, the more attractive it gets for donors. It is a cycle that is iterative and fortifies itself. The unique alliance of immense wealth, celebrity, and fashion spectacle has created a lever most effective in achieving its goal. Wielding its power of its combined forms of capital has created an outcome hardly replicated anywhere.

VI. Conclusion

As outlined in this thesis, the two case studies of Bertha Palmer's bequest to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Met Gala, reflect two sides of the same coin within the world of American museum funding. While demonstrating seemingly different patterns of donor mechanisms, this research has highlighted the fact that they are still functional within the same social and historical framework and reflect congruent social structures. The introduction of this thesis claimed that the history of the museum landscape within the United States can be traced along its patrons, as their contributions heavily impact institutional development as a whole, as well as individual departmental growth.

The first case study, Bertha Palmer and her bequest to the Art Institute of Chicago, represents a period in this nation's history when many of its cultural foundations were set in the public sphere. Artistic education, cultural literacy, and maturing national foundations were thought to be found in institutionalized availability of artwork. By leaving part of her immense art collection to what is now considered a major cultural institution within the global museum landscape, Bertha Palmer's bequest becomes a symbol of an evolving, but sophisticated cultural environment.

The second case study, Anna Wintour and the Met Gala, show different fundraising structures in the sense that its public reach and presence can be felt much more frequently. The annual event has created structures whose effects can be witnessed both within and outside the institution. By further bridging the gap between institutionalized artwork and the fashion industry, a new intersection within the landscape of cultural education of the public receives support from wealthy donors.

At its core, the museum landscape in the United States exists the way it does today because of how it has been shaped by its patrons. Founded with the idea of educating the public and providing a young nation with cultural foundations, large cultural institutions in the United States have taken it upon themselves to be more than mere buildings that house art. Within that context, it is imperative for large cultural institutions to continue to investigate their own position within the broader context of social development of the communities they serve. Examining their own history and deciding which parts of their findings they want to present in which way to their publics is a crucial part of it.

Prompted by the 2020 summer of protest, the country and its people are once again facing an opportunity to turn inward and reflect on its history. This moment of introspection and the resulting actions will dictate which path is taken into the future. Just as the social sphere experienced a moment of widely felt shock, companies and institutions have publicly pledged to take time to look within and address the problematic structures engrained in institutional foundations. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, institutional identity in American cultural institutions is closely linked to its patrons. Nonetheless, there is great flexibility within these relationships and the systems that govern them. In their response to the modern challenges and opportunities, museums will find and carve out ways to respond to the shifting interests and demands. They will continue to be able to do so effectively by operating within these long established, proven, and flexible systems.

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