

# THE GETTY GOES GLOBAL

In its rush to spend but not offend, the J. Paul Getty Trust builds the strangest Ivory Tower of them all.

By Maks Westerman

**B**y the time I arrived at page 12 of the Getty's most recent tax-return—with 408 pages to go—one thing had already become clear: the IRS may soon have to design a new form, just for the J. Paul Getty Trust. The figures in front of me were endless strings of digits, too bloated for the allocated space. Here's what was crammed into the line for total assets: \$3,414,666,464. The awesome power represented in that abstraction might be hard to grasp: think of it as the art-world equivalent of  $E=MC^2$ ; in its own way, it's as potentially explosive.

The legacy that J. Paul Getty left behind is no longer just a little museum in Malibu. It has gone global, branching out into other art-related fields. But how it finances its advance, the IRS doesn't ask.

And the Getty won't say. The world's richest art institution is also one of the most secretive—a very private public trust.

Amazingly, until just four years ago, the Getty was a relative pauper in the art world. Established in 1953 as the repository for the fruits of J. Paul's erratic collecting splurges (see "J. Paul's Little Museum" on page 54), the museum long operated on a yearly budget of \$25,000. When its benefactor died



Illustration by Brian Cronin

Maks Westerman is a former *Newsweek* correspondent and *Business Week* editor.

in 1976, the endowment stood at a modest \$40 million. To the considerable surprise (and consternation) of the art world—as well as J. Paul's many girlfriends—he bequeathed virtually his entire estate to the recreated Pompeian villa in Malibu he had never even visited.

Getty officials, who had been eking out a minor, often derided role in the art community, woke up one morning to find themselves in charge of the richest museum in the world. When the estate was finally settled in 1982—after much litigation—the endowment stood at \$1.3 billion. Another \$750 million was added in 1984, when the institution sold its stock in the Getty Oil company to Texaco, facilitating the largest corporate merger in U.S. history.

To comply with IRS regulations, the trust has to spend

at least 4.25 percent of its endowment a year. At last checking, the fund, whose magnitude is dependent on stock-market vagaries, stood at \$2.9 billion—nine times that of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Getty seems to have no trouble spending all that money. Last year its expenditures added up to \$150 million—600 times its own mid-1960s budget, \$20 million more than the Ford Foundation. But unlike the Ford Foundation, and most other such institutions, the Getty does not publish an annual report. It keeps mum about all that might be controversial,



## J. PAUL'S LITTLE MUSEUM

*"In his mind, Getty came close to being king of the world."*

The true worth of a collection," J. Paul Getty once wrote, "cannot—and should not—be measured solely in terms of its monetary value." Nevertheless, J. Paul purchased works of art in much the same way that he purchased oil wells—by looking for bargains. He concentrated on undervalued fields with an eye open for the main chance.

His timing was perfect. Just as he made some of his best oil buys during the Depression, when prices were at rock bottom, he created the nucleus of his collection of French furniture in 1938 when the advent of World War II lowered prices. He also indulged his affection for the classical world by buying Greek and Roman sculpture and pottery (its limited numbers made him consider it an excellent investment).

Size was as important to him as price. "In his mind Getty came close to being king of the world," a New York dealer said. "He only wanted to buy regal works." The bigger the sculpture, the more likely it was to find a buyer in J. Paul.

He had, however, "an uneasy relation" with paintings. "Pictures have become too fashionable," he said. When the Metropolitan Museum spent \$2.3 million on a Rembrandt, Getty was appalled. As for the pictures he did buy, an irreverent critic once suggested he send most of them back to their original owners—for free.

"Stop buying this rubbish," chided his friend, steel magnate Baron Thyssen. "Buy a good picture for once." Thyssen struck a chord and Getty briefly went on a paintings binge. At a 1971 Christie's auction he paid \$6 million for a Titian, a Van Dyck, and two Bouchers—never had he spent so much on art so fast. But by giving his museum most of his acquisitions, he also managed to reduce his taxes considerably. (In 1975 the world's richest man converted half his income to "charitable" art, and thus paid only 14 percent to the IRS.)

In his diaries, Getty compared his own collections with Hearst's and Hadrian's. In 1951 Getty left the U.S. for good; three years later his ranch house in Malibu opened to the public two afternoons a week as a museum. In 1968 he decided to build an archaeologically exact recreation of the Villa dei Papiri, one of the largest private homes in the Roman empire, owned by Julius Caesar's father-in-law. ("My Taj Mahal," he once fondly referred to it.) Built in a narrow valley a few hundred yards from the Pacific, the new building opened in 1974. According to the museum, over 300,000 people a year visit, though there are only twelve parking spaces (for which reservations must be made a week in advance). J. Paul and two of his sons are buried on the grounds. When the new center opens, it will house most of the collection, but the antiquities will stay behind with J. Paul in Malibu. □

especially money. Details about museum acquisitions are hard to come by; the most recent catalogue is two years out of date. So-called "calendar" updates have almost exclusively listed works of art that were already in the 1985 catalogue. When I asked museum director John Walsh how much he is spending on art in Britain, he answered in a hushed, slightly reproachful voice: "We don't talk about money here," as if bringing up pecuniary matters in a temple of art is just not done.

Even in more mundane surroundings such queries are shunted aside. When I asked Philippa Calnan, the trust's nimble public-relations director, how much is being spent on a program that was described to me as an attempt "to overhaul the art-education system of America," she is silent for a while, then muttered: "Gee, that question makes me really nervous. I hope our programs won't be evaluated by what they cost."

But, of course, they will, at least in part. Scrutiny is the price of being tax-exempt—and, let's face it, the curse of being as rich as Getty. Barring a collapse of the economy, the trust's endowment may be worth \$10 billion by the year 2000, the Getty then spending close to \$2 million every weekday, and foregoing taxes that could add up to well over \$100 million.

Upsetting the status quo, and doing it with so much money, was bound to offend large segments of the art world. Getty public-relations people say they spend much of their time answering what they call "unfounded, ill-informed, and confused" press inquiries. They instinctively act on the defensive, jotting down conversations between visiting journalists and Getty officials, and listening in on their phone calls. But they may soon feel it's safe to leave the trenches, because, as program director Kurt Forster puts it: "The snowballs thrown at us are no longer so massive—and they melt away quickly."

*"Being the Getty brings along a certain responsibility. So we are very frugal. Really."*

The art world's greatest fear in 1982—that the Getty would wreak havoc on the art market by spending all its money on acquisitions—did not materialize. The museum was renamed the J. Paul Getty Trust, to reflect a swiftly widening scope of activities. From his English mansion, J. Paul had supervised the museum's operations with penny-pinching meticulousness, but in his will he left the trustees free to spend his fortune as they pleased, provided they promote "the diffusion of artistic and general knowledge." Besides intensifying the search for art treasures for the museum (see "Collecting Collections" on page 57), the trust also began to devote its resources to education, conservation, scholarship, and computerized information-gathering on an unprecedented scale.



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Getty representatives can be found bidding—and, often, outbidding—in auction houses in New York, London, and Geneva. But they are also roaming about Egyptian tombs, trying to develop economic methods of preservation. The trust is financing seminars in Tokyo, has computers buzzing in Ottawa and Rome, sends freelance editors rummaging in family archives in England, Italy, France, and Holland, and is reeducating American classroom teachers. With a small but widely spread grant program it is sharing parts of its wealth with hundreds of scholars and art institutions, at home and abroad. And, on a cluster of hills overlooking Los Angeles, bulldozers are already leveling the site that will become the Getty Center, a \$100-million-plus citadel of art, housing all the Getty's offices, including a second museum.

Until the hilltop center's completion (now projected for late 1992), the Getty operation will remain an inconspicuous giant, its offices spread out in obscure locations all over the Los Angeles area. The trust's nerve center fills a rental floor in a corporate high-rise on the edge of Beverly Hills. It is furnished in an expensive, but aseptic style—as if the architect could think of just one Getty: the oil company. The only things suggestive of an aesthetic presence are the carefully selected art works on the walls—all quite contemporary (a field of collecting the museum has promised to stay away from). In Philippa Calnan's office, I sat under a small Louise Nevelson. But, lest I draw the wrong conclusions, she admonished: "We realize that being the Getty brings along a certain responsibility. So we are very frugal. Really."

This is a refrain I would hear again and again from Getty officials. "Friends of mine say, 'What do you mean you can't go to Paris for the weekend? You work for the Getty, don't you?'" says Calnan. "Sometimes I wish it were like that. But it isn't." Getty frugality is not only a tradition that stems from J. Paul (who put a pay phone in his house and who once reprimanded a high-level employee for not asking his permission to buy a pencil sharpener), it's also a public-relations necessity when such huge sums of money are being spent. Any extravagance that leaked out would instantly be followed by charges of irresponsibility. Consequently, salaries at the Getty are only a notch above average—just enough to attract talent from elsewhere (about 450 of its 500 employees are paid under \$30,000 a year). And, like in the old days, every expense, including pencil sharpeners, must be accounted for. Michael Ester, one of the program directors, says: "Sometimes I get less than I ask for. Or I don't get it at all."

That depends on Harold Williams, the Getty's philosopher-king. As president and chief executive officer, he sets the trust's overall direction, leaving program directors, as one of them puts it, with "extreme freedom" to fill in the details. Before joining the Getty in 1982, he was Jimmy Carter's head of the Securities and Exchange Commission. He arrived there from a stint as chairman of Norton Simon, Inc. Simon, of

course, is not just a businessman, but also a major collector whose Pasadena-based museum dwarfs the Getty's holdings of old-master, impressionist, and modern art.

In fact, the Norton Simon Museum is widely respected while the Getty has only just begun to prove itself. But Norton Simon's wife, Jennifer Jones Simon, is a trustee of the Getty Museum, and the two institutions have thus far bought two pictures jointly. So it is no wonder that Williams's arrival at the Getty set tongues wagging even more furiously about the possibility of a merger—about a Getty-Simon or a Simon-Getty museum.

"I would like to see it happen, and we do talk about it from time to time. But it is not a likely prospect, and certainly not an imminent one," says Williams in the slow, guarded manner of a man who knows that in his position every word may be worth millions—lost or gained. But of what use would a merger be for the Norton Simon? What does it have to gain? "There is no other institution around that is able to assure the kind of permanence of retention and caring and exhibition as the Getty," says Williams. "The Norton Simon is an amazing collection, a real tribute to the man. I would like to see it preserved in that way."

### *"The entry of the Getty into the art market has undoubtedly raised the prices of art."*

U.S. journalists mostly report about the Getty in cheering tones. "The statesmanship of the Getty Trust will have given [Los Angeles] a cultural ornament unrivaled in any metropolis," wrote columnist George Will. "Many people at the Getty have a dreamy glint in their eyes," raved art critic Mark Stevens in *Newsweek*. "Wish them well."

Abroad, however, that appeal has gone largely unheeded. The British press has been shelling the Getty relentlessly. Its paper-of-record, the *London Times*, has taken a lead in scrutinizing the museum's activities "ad nauseum," as a Getty official puts it. In three full-page articles, it has analyzed—and supported—doubts about the authenticity of the Getty's *Annunciation*, a \$7 million painting that its owner attributes to Dieric Bouts (see "Battle of the Bouts" on page 61). The *Times*'s salesroom correspondent, Geraldine Norman, went so far as to raise—and immediately drop—"the question of whether the museum was justified in taking such risks with [tax-exempt] money." Williams shrugs the criticism off as "background noise." And Calnan says, "Innocence is great in the eyes of God, but is dreary in the eyes of the press."

One of the counts on which the museum pleads not guilty is "the Getty factor"—the issue of how the Getty's voracious



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art appetite is affecting prices. "The entry of the Getty into the art market has undoubtedly raised the prices of art—notably in the field of drawings," says Philippe de Montebello, director of New York's Metropolitan Museum.

De Montebello once estimated that the Getty factor has boosted prices 30 percent in the areas in which it collects. But for top-of-the-market works—the masterpieces that John Walsh knows history will congratulate him for bagging—the effect may be even larger. Last year, the Getty paid \$10.4 million for an Italian Renaissance painting, Andrea Mantegna's *Adoration of the Magi*. The price was the highest ever paid for a picture. "Had the Getty not been interested in the Mantegna," says Geraldine Norman of the *London Times*, "it would probably have gone for less than half."

*"There are plenty of collectors who are willing to pay what we are accused of inflating the market with."*

**L**ike the Mantegna, many Getty works originate in England. It has led the British to fear for what a headline-writer dubbed the "Plunder of a Nation." Other European countries have put a ban on the export of masterpieces. But not Britain, although the Getty factor has prompted some parliamentarians to call for stricter laws to prevent the wholesale exodus of "our national patrimony."

Under current law, Britain withholds an export license only when, after a sale, a foreign offer is matched by a domestic bid. This has happened to a few Getty purchases, in part because of the emergence of another "Getty factor"—the generosity of J. Paul Getty, Jr., the oil tycoon's son who lives in England. In 1984, J. Paul Jr. donated half a million dollars to a campaign to help match the Getty's \$2.4 million bid for a fourteenth-century crucifixion scene by Duccio di Buoninsegna. And last year he gave \$63 million to the National Gallery in London. "None of the American galleries need my help," he explained, "least of all the J. Paul Getty Museum."

The Getty argues that prices for important old-master paintings are high simply because they almost never come on the market any longer. "People are behaving as if the end is in sight," says John Walsh. "There are plenty of collectors out there who are willing to pay what we are accused of inflating the market with." Williams suggests that some British dealers are using the Getty factor to raise prices: "They go up to a collector, and say, 'The Getty has offered x dollars for this painting. Do you want to outbid them?'"

But the Getty, too, has been charged with cunning use of dealers. At Christie's 1984 auction in London of old-master drawings from the Chatsworth collection—which included

## COLLECTING COLLECTIONS

*"Like private collectors," says Walsh, "we look for opportunity."*

**I** only get my thrills from collecting if I can do it big," says Thom Kren, the Getty's curator of manuscripts. In 1983 he was instrumental in what may have been the biggest art purchase ever—the acquisition of the Ludwig collection of 144 medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts.

An assistant curator of paintings at the time, Kren was the only one at the Getty who knew something about manuscripts. So when the museum received word that the collection was for sale, Kren was sent into a Swiss bank vault to evaluate them. Next he flew to Cologne to meet with Peter Ludwig, the owner, who quoted a price that was "nuts—very unreasonable." But it was obvious to Kren that "Ludwig badly needed money." The Getty eventually got the collection for about half the asking price—a reported \$31 million—making it probably the most expensive art purchase of all time (the entire Chatsworth sale sold for \$28.5 million).

Manuscripts had never before been on the Getty's agenda. But, says John Walsh, "We don't have tidy ideas about what the collection should be like. Like private collectors, we look for opportunity."

In 1984 the museum made a grand entrance into photography, when it paid about \$20 million for 18,000 photographs, including four private collections. George Goldner's drawings collection has also been swiftly growing: over the past year he has nearly doubled it to a total of 175. A department of sculpture and works of art was set up in 1984.

In sheer size, the antiquities collection remains the most significant. Since Getty's death it has been supplemented considerably. Its major acquisition is a sixth-century B.C. kouros, which went on display last month (see "The Last Snowball?" on page 62). The decorative-arts collection has seen little change: Getty himself had already made it America's finest.

Many have wondered whether the Getty would ever spend its money on modern or contemporary art. The museum has edged into the twentieth century, but very slowly. A Cézanne watercolor, for example, acquired in 1983, is dated "circa 1900." "Don't look for the Getty to jump into contemporary art," Walsh says, but, he adds, "If you asked the board of trustees if modern art is forever forbidden, they would look at you as if you were crazy."

Most acquisition money is spent on the paintings collection, which remains uneven, though there are a number of acknowledged masterpieces. Wandering through the galleries I was struck by a curious Edvard Munch painting. Surrounded by much older works, it looked rather forlorn and out-of-place. "We're not too worried about that," says Walsh. "Its brothers and sisters will eventually be here." □



works by Mantegna, Leonardo, Rembrandt, Raphael, Titian, and Van Dyck—it bought only six of the seventy-one lots. George Goldner, curator of the old-master drawings department, let the two star lots escape. Barbara Piasecka Johnson, heiress to the Johnson and Johnson fortune, got Raphael's *Study of a Man's Head and a Hand* for \$4.8 million, and architect-collector Ian Woodner managed to acquire a page from Vasari's famous *Libro de Disegni* for \$4.4 million.

Walsh said the Getty had consciously "decided that it would not dominate that sale." And, indeed, the Getty won a great deal of praise for restraint at what turned out to be the most expensive auction ever held in Britain. Nevertheless, in the two years since that sale the total of six drawings has—very quietly—grown to nineteen thus far: "As we unexpectedly lost the two most important drawings," Goldner says, "we had the resources to be able to buy more later." The thirteen new drawings (which include works by Leonardo, Van Dyck, Rembrandt, and Titian), all purchased through dealers, originally sold at the sale for more than \$4 million.

It has also been suggested that the Getty might avoid stepping on national toes by setting up foreign branches of its museum, thereby being able to buy and own works of art but keep them on their native soil—a way for the trust to have its cake and eat it, too. "It's conceivable," says Williams, "but not in the near future. We have more on our plate than we need at this point. Besides, we've discovered plenty of other ways to be supportive of art institutions around the world."

*"At the rate they're handing out fellowships we'll all be working for the Getty in ten years."*

One of those ways is the grant program the trust established two years ago. Thus far, it has distributed only about \$20 million, and much of this has gone to museums in the Los Angeles area. But some British scholars and institutions have also been remembered handsomely. Predictably, this has led to charges of cooptation. "At the rate they're handing out fellowships and subsidizing publications," one prominent art historian complained, "we'll all be working for the Getty in ten years." Williams admits that the grant money "is bound to have some effect. The grants have made a difference to a number of institutions and individuals in art scholarship. I would hope that has brought us some goodwill, as well."

One Getty program that has generated some goodwill was the one described to me as the plan "to overhaul the art-education system of America." They are the words of Lani Duke, director of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

The program is still in its formative stages: grants have so far been given to only a few school districts, mostly in the Los Angeles area. The center does not track the implementation of its program, but at least one critic, Suzanne Muchnic, has hailed it as an extraordinary success. After visiting one of the schools that has adopted a curriculum developed and financed by the trust, she lyrically wrote of Art B.G. and A.G.—Before and After Getty. (This would have pleased J. Paul, who thought he was the reincarnation of a Roman emperor.)

The Getty's "discipline-based" art education incorporates four components: aesthetics, art history, criticism, and production. It succeeds in getting first-graders to discuss paintings by Vincent van Gogh and Paul Klee and make observations like: "There is symmetry at my house." And, "If Renoir was alive, I would say: congratulations." "Most kids only learn how to memorize, not how to think," Duke says. "We want them to express how they see art, and how it relates to other knowledge."

*"I'm uncomfortably comfortable we're headed in the right direction."*

In a Santa Monica office building just four blocks from the beach is the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. Parts of its cement-paved quarters have the chill, forbidding look of a mausoleum—"splendid in the simplicity of its design and detail," says the program's energetic director, Kurt Forster. The temporary design (the center, too, will eventually move up the hill) was "cheap," he says, "I'm Swiss, you know."

A former art-history professor, Forster speaks with the speed and passion of a man consumed by a mission. His is: "to make L.A. the place to study art—to set up a place where scholars from any country and field gather to work on quite focused issues." Each year a handful of scholars and other individuals is selected, flown to Santa Monica, set up in an apartment by the beach, and paid the equivalent of what they would have earned in the outside world. Once they have arrived, Forster hopes their personalities and interests in proximity will set off intellectual sparks. Nothing is asked of them in return. "If they want to spend all their time lying on the beach," says Forster, "they can." But: "When you take all the pressure to perform off people, and leave them to their own devices, they become astonishingly productive."

These scholars will have extraordinary resources on hand. Purchasing entire libraries from the estates of art historians, Forster has stacked half a million books onto the shelves of what in a few years will be the largest art-history library in the world. At this stage, he is "engaged in a massive gathering



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operation." "After that," he says, "we're going to look for the needles in the haystack."

Complementing the library is a photo archive that, besides collecting photographs, also takes them. It went to fourteen different locations to record all 50,000 fragments of Trajan's Forum in the center of Rome—a step Forster calls "as significant as the first mappings of the area in the 1830s." Yet another facet is the Archive of the History of Art, which collects the correspondence, records, and unpublished studies of scholars, critics, artists, architects, and photographers. Among the archive's original documents are notes, drawings, and letters by Daumier, Matisse, Marinetti, and Magritte. "The twentieth century is very much alive here," Forster points out. His division of the Getty set a record recently when it paid \$132,000 for the manuscript of *Nan-Nan*, Gauguin's classic Tahitian diary. No one protested. "You can still create a major library without the perturbation of collecting painting," Forster says.

Trying to keep it that way, he occasionally turns down tempting, but "hazardous," materials. Last year Forster was approached with the offer of an extremely rare and valuable Mayan codex from the 1540s. "Williams and I went to the appointed meeting place," he recalls. "The codex featured detailed maps of colonial Spanish settlements—a very rare treat." But he turned it down, in part because there was a hole where the signature of ownership should have been. The fact that the codex might have been stolen or smuggled was not at all surprising for someone working at the Getty: "Something of the kind happens here every week."

Thanks to the Getty, tracking down such objects of questionable provenance may become easier in the future. The trust has taken a lead in gathering and automating information on all aspects of art collecting and provenance. At the Getty Art History Information Program, a globe-spanning network of computers is being fed with data gathered by freelance editors working in the field, from the card indices maintained in museums, and from all available auction records. The architecture of the program's central office contrasts sharply with the spartan concrete of Forster's quarters four stories below in the same building. Here I emerged into playful, labyrinthine, postmodern hallways painted in bright colors, its futuristic look befitting the program's linkage of state-of-the-art technology with historical data. I was guided past a room filled with computer terminals—a kind of miniature NASA control center—into the office of Michael Ester, the program's director.

Ester, thirty-eight, is the Getty's whiz kid, with Ph.D.s in both computer science and archaeology. His program is so high-tech and abstract that, soon after he started speaking, even the two public-relations officials assigned as my escorts stopped taking notes. "We're not an electronic shoebox," he said, reaching for terms that would make his agenda concrete. But, in fact, one of the primary purposes of his program



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is to eliminate the need for art historians to spend years filling their own shoeboxes with index cards.

In a venture with Brown University, the trust funded a study whose goal is to discover just what it is that art historians do. After extensive interviews, one aspect of the scholar's task became clear. As Ester puts it, "They spend more time collecting information than using it." Their problems are compounded by a lack of coordination, which results in frequent duplication of effort. "What you have now is a near Tower of Babel," Ester says. To "keep people from reinventing the wheel," his staff is trying to develop new techniques that will ease the task and get scholars to share their work.

Moreover, in cooperation with museums and auction houses around the world, Ester is setting up the first comprehensive, computerized catalogue of paintings. The project, supervised by Burton Fredericksen, former curator of paintings at the Getty Museum, is now compiling British auction records from the year 1801 on, and has completed about 50,000 thus far. "We figure that almost any important painting that's changed hands since 1800 has passed through London," Fredericksen says. In addition, editors throughout Europe are combing, collating, and keyboarding the contents of archives and lists relating to individual collectors from the Middle Ages onward.

### BATTLE OF THE BOUTS

#### *A very saintly, very expensive, and very strange painting: the Getty's \$7 million Annunciation.*

When I asked John Walsh, director of the Getty Museum, about French art dealer Alain Tarica, he noticeably cringed. His eyes fixed on the ceiling, Walsh snapped: "That man is a character straight out of Halloween." Alain Tarica was equally uncomplimentary about Walsh: "He is an idiot sitting on a big pile of money."

At the root of this shouting match is a very saintly, very expensive, and very strange painting: the Getty's \$7 million *Annunciation*. The museum has attributed the painting to Dieric Bouts, a fifteenth-century Flemish master. Tarica calls it a "banal pastiche," insisting that it must be a twentieth-century fake on an old linen canvas.

He has been crusading against the painting for two years, ever since advising Ronald Lauder, U.S. ambassador to Austria, not to buy it. Tarica felt his honor was at stake; the Getty acquired the picture almost the moment Lauder declined, and then went on to ridicule Tarica's arguments as having caused "general hilarity."

In the *London Times* Geraldine Norman took up Tarica's case, writing a series of well-documented articles reporting on the eccentricities in the painting that had sparked Tarica's doubts. *New York Times* critic John Russell had a good laugh. "What a story! What a scoop!" he sneered. Any scholar traveling to Malibu to question its authenticity would be running "a fool's errand," he said.

But would he? Though few Flemish-art experts believe the picture is a twentieth-century fake, many question its attribution to Bouts. "Some aspects of the painting are iconographically impossible," says Roger d'Hulst of the University of Ghent. Barbara Lane, head of the department of art at Queens College, says: "The hand of the Angel is covered by a piece of drapery, as if she's pulling a gun on the Virgin." James Snyder, one of the few scholars who have published on Bouts, says

he believes the iconographic inconsistencies are "due to repaint or restoration." Roger van Schoute, of the University of Louvain, considered one of the most prominent experts on the technical aspects of Flemish painting, wrote in a letter to Tarica: "I am skeptical about the attribution of the museum."

Most of them, however, reserve final judgment until the Getty has the painting checked scientifically by scholars not on its payroll. "If something like this happened in Europe," d'Hulst said, "the first thing a museum would do is to make all its material public, and invite the experts to come in and study it." The Getty has done neither.

The museum has not published the results of its own examination and John Walsh has declined to have the painting examined by the prestigious Brussels Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique. "We don't want to sound snobbish," Walsh says, "but the notion of flying this work of art around the world is preposterous." The Getty has also refused to invite Belgian scholars to study the painting in Malibu, even though its own examination was by no means exhaustive. "I could have done a lot more tests," admits Frank Preusser of the conservation institute. "If we had reason to doubt the painting, we would have done so."

*Art & Antiques* would have liked to reproduce the *Annunciation*—a beautiful painting, whether authentic or not. But a transparency could not be located—unless we agreed to conditions we could not accept. Perhaps the museum hopes that out-of-sight will eventually turn into out-of-mind. Given Tarica's singleminded determination to keep the issue alive, that wish is unlikely to come true. Frank Preusser is correct when he says that "It takes only one man to ruin the reputation of a painting." Equally true, unfortunately, is that it may take only one painting to tarnish the reputation of a museum. □



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A twenty-minute drive down the freeway to Marina del Rey brought me to the Getty Conservation Institute. The "dreamy glint" *Newsweek* spoke of is clearly in the eyes of Luis Monreale, the institute's effervescent director, whose staff engages in activities that look to a layman very much like those that mad scientists are depicted doing. Because, Monreale says, "the conservation field is too small a market for specialized equipment to be produced," but "art is made of many different materials, most of which were already tested in industry," the Getty is adapting machinery made for other purposes to the needs of conservators.

A machine invented by a cereal manufacturer to test the shelf-life of his product now gauges the oxidation stability of objects for museums. And a colossal contraption called a "weatherometer," which was developed for the paint and

automobile industry, now examines the impact of different environmental conditions on works of art. It was a section of Monreale's division that performed the innovative conservation work the Getty's \$7 million ancient Greek kouros necessitated (see "The Last Snowball?" below).

The former secretary general of the International Council of Museums, Monreale runs what may well be the trust's most sorely needed program. Art treasures are rapidly decaying all over the world, through neglect, ignorance, aggression, and environmental factors. An organization with the resources of the Getty may make a real difference. "The countries with a rich cultural heritage often are also the ones with meager financial resources," says Monreale. "A country like Peru has no fewer than 50,000 archaeological sites, but very little money. Spain has 4,000 medieval castles, but allocates

### THE LAST SNOWBALL?

#### *Was the Getty's \$7 million ancient Greek kouros "a notorious fake" and "simply revolting"?*

When Kurt Forster, director of the Getty's Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, said that "the snowballs thrown at us are no longer so massive—and they melt away quickly," the last, slushy snowball he was referring to had been thrown by Thomas Hoving, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and now editor of *Connoisseur*. In a recent article, Hoving wondered if a kouros—an ancient Greek sculpture of a youth—which the Getty had acquired for \$7 million, was "sixth century B.C. or twentieth century A.D.?" Hoving quoted Italian art restorer Pico Cellini calling the kouros "a notorious fake" and "simply revolting." But Cellini had never seen the statue. The photographs Cellini claims he did see, as it transpired, are probably of another kouros; this one, indeed, a fake.

The reason Forster was able to laugh off Cellini's doubts is that, in the case of the kouros, the Getty's Conservation Institute has performed the most elaborate and groundbreaking studies ever made on a Greek sculpture. The results seem to prove that the Getty's kouros is, as Luis Monreale, director of the Getty's Conservation Institute puts it, "at least a couple of thousand years old."

The analysis, much of which was done by outside scientists overseen by Getty scientific director Frank Preusser, will soon be published in official form—an openness that sharply contrasts with the Getty's stonewalling in the Bouts controversy.

Two drill samples were taken from breaks in the sculpture. Through a combination of various techniques, borrowed mainly from the field of geology—X-ray diffraction, electron-beam

microprobe analysis, and stable isotope analysis—Stanley Margolis of the University of California has proven that the surface crust on the kouros was formed through a process called "dedolomitization." This is a natural weathering process during which magnesium carbonate is selectively leached out of dolomitic marble. It can only occur during burial, and takes many centuries. No method is known that would permit a forger to reproduce the process on anything other than a tiny, powdered sample. Moreover, using similarly sophisticated techniques, Norman Herz of the University of Georgia came to the conclusion that the stone came "with a very high probability" from the Greek island of Thassos.

As involved as the authenticity testing was the reassembly of the kouros. It arrived in Malibu in seven pieces. Geochemists and seismic engineers were called in to help devise a method of reconstruction that was previously known in industry and structural engineering but had never before been applied to sculpture. A Plexiglas material used in bulletproof vests helps hold together the fractured joints. An aircraft cable running through the legs from the knees down anchors the statue to its base.

In the most complex mounting attempt to date, the Getty's preservation people have made sure that if California perishes in an earthquake, the kouros will survive. A complex system of ball bearings, spring-loaded centering devices, and vertical shock-absorbing pads made of a material used in sneakers, add up to an isolation base that allows the floor to dance under the statue without affecting its stately posture. □



only a pittance to their preservation." Monreale has no illusions that the Getty is going to singlehandedly save the world's cultural wealth. But it may help in setting priorities. "Most countries will only be able to preserve a small percentage of their legacy—the choice of strategies is therefore very important."

Every time you look, the Getty's horn of plenty dispenses another program, displays another project, another acquisition. To see its latest showcase you have to head down the Nile to the tomb of Nefertari, Ramses II's favorite wife, where Getty money has assembled a team of Egyptian and foreign specialists to study and remedy the causes of decay in wall paintings.

Regarding the sum of all these programs, Williams says, "I'm uncomfortably comfortable we're heading in the right direction."

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As IRS jargon has it, the Getty is an "exempt private foundation," a charitable institution. Everybody has his own ideas about what is deserving of taxpayer-supported charity. The education of American children? Probably. Nefertari? Maybe. The maintenance of a private museum that requires visitors who arrive by car to make reservations a week in advance—a place that, a former staff member says, "paid me to keep people off the marble floors?"

Before making up his mind, someone somewhere just might want to know exactly how much is going to Nefertari.

How much charity is involved in each Getty program? It was in the hope of finding out that I first turned to the Getty's tax form. It was interesting to learn that the Getty has \$1,369,471 in "non-interest bearing" cash lying around; that it plays the stock market with \$2.2 billion and the advice of eleven investment bankers; that it spent \$39 million on IBM stock and owns \$8 million worth of Coca-Cola. But what if you are more interested in Rembrandt than Royal Dutch Petroleum, in Greek sculpture than General Electric, in Bouts than Boeing? What if you want to know how much an organization that's been accused of pillaging the art world is spending on acquisitions?

The man who makes sure the money keeps coming in, preferably in excess of what is spent, is Joseph Kearns, the Getty's treasurer. I asked Kearns why the public isn't shown how the money is spent, why annual reports have not been forthcoming. "We concluded that an annual report would be confusing," he said. "Most of the programs are still in an early stage of development, and we haven't settled on final percentages yet."

"We wanted people not to focus on the money but on the substance," says Philippa Calnan, the public-relations director. She is echoed by Harold Williams: openness "would raise more questions than it would answer," says the man who, as head of the SEC, was the very embodiment of the principle of financial disclosure.

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One morning Philippa Calnan drove me up the hill where in 1993 the Getty will reassemble itself amidst 740 acres of splendid isolation. Los Angeles lies below, the Pacific Ocean beyond. Shading my eyes against the sun, I thought of a line from one of the trust's brochures: "That clear, golden Southern California light is intoxicating..." The words were those of Richard Meier, the New York architect who relocated west to build what a Beverly Hills assemblyman calls "the American Acropolis."

Meier, known for his stark buildings sheathed in white porcelain-enameled steel panels, saw his "dream of a lifetime" come true after an exhaustive selection procedure. The Getty hired Bill Lacy, president of New York's Cooper Union, to supervise a panel of judges consisting of three college presidents, a curator, a critic, and a businessman. In a series of what he called "flying seminars of the air" they went on an architectural sightseeing trip around the world, visiting candidates and their buildings. Meier was selected after promising to abandon his cool Corbusier-inspired style and experiment with new materials, including such antimodernist substances as wood and stone. His first sketches are due within months, and will incorporate the results of yet more travel: a trip around the United States and Europe by the architect and Getty program directors. "A building that got everybody thinking—a riveting experience—was the Certosa del Galuzzo," the group reported. The monastery outside Florence inspired thoughts of a "secular monastery with a sense of calm and historic purpose."

The public might prefer something a little less exclusive, a bit more accessible. But a monastery is just fine with the Getty's wealthy new neighbors. They had already voiced fears that visitors to the J. Paul Getty Center might bring binoculars and peer down from the hilltops into their pools and hot tubs. Their concerns were far-fetched: presumably the Getty will have enough art by then to hold the attention of any potential voyeurs. Just as far-fetched but more telling is the unofficial riposte of a Getty security guard: "What we should worry about is them looking up here." □