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IB Roob 6/3/83

A selection of books on modern art available to Alfred Barr in the 1920s

Rona Roob
Literature of the Fine Arts
Professor Thompson
April 1982

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In July, 1929, Professor Paul J. Sachs of Harvard recommended to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (Mrs. John D., Jr.) that Alfred H. Barr, Jr., then Associate Professor of the History of Art at Wellesley College, be considered for the position of director of the new museum devoted to modern art which she, Miss Lillie P. Bliss and Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan had organized. At Wellesley, Barr had been teaching the first course in America which comprehensively synthesized the modern visual arts--painting, sculpture, architecture, graphics, the cinema and industrial design; this course, in fact, anticipated the multi-departmental plan of the Museum of Modern Art. Sachs had been impressed with Barr as a graduate student in 1924: "... he (Barr) thought deeply and ranged widely on the whole field of art..."[1] Mrs. Rockefeller, five years later, agreed with Sachs' assessment and Barr became the first Director of the new Museum. (Russell Lynes' book, Good Old Modern: an intimate portrait of the Museum of Modern Art (New York: Atheneum, 1973; chapter 2) and Dwight MacDonald's "profile" of Barr in The New Yorker (29(43):49-82 and 29(44):35-72; 12 and 19 December 1953) are reliable sources for early MoMA history and Alfred Barr's background.) Barr began to write immediately about and for the new Museum: by August 1929 MoMA's first publication appeared, a pamphlet which explained in broad terms the Museum's purpose; three months later, in November, MoMA's first exhibition, Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and van Gogh, opened with a catalog by Barr. In a letter to A. Conger Goodyear some years later (August 11, 1941) Barr wrote: "As an undergraduate, graduate student and instructor at Princeton and Harvard

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my interest in modern art was almost entirely extracurricular (except for a term paper on modern prints prepared for Professor Sachs). Two academic tendencies did, however, provoke in me a strong reaction--one ~~who~~ was the general ignorance of or contempt for 20th century art on the part of most of my teachers... During these years I made both friends and enemies by advocating more attention...to modern art..."[2] What books on modern art were available in America in the 1920s? Which of these are relevant to Barr's perception of modern art in the years before 1929 when the museum was founded?

In an article called "Understanding Modern Art" published in The Wellesley Alumnae Magazine (13(5): 304-035; 1929 June), Barr recommended that those interested in nineteenth century painting consult Frank J. Mather's Modern Painting (New York: Holt; c. 1927). The book does cover modern art through the 1920s. In his Wellesley piece Barr describes Mather as a distinguished humanist who in this book is "insufficiently sympathetic" to the art of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Mather's book was an expanded and revised (11/26) edition of lectures delivered in 1916; "the two chapters on Modernism are new" (verso of title page). Barr and Mather enjoyed a close relationship at Princeton; Mather, who taught Italian and Northern painting, has been described as "breezy and conversational;" he allowed smoking in class;[3] furthermore, Mather was writing and talking informally about contemporary art in 1920-21. In his diary on May 25, 1921, during his junior year at Princeton, Barr wrote "take father to Professor Mather's lecture of (sic) the cubists and synchromists... excellent, Mather clever..."[4] However, in a personal letter of 1931

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to the editor of The Saturday Review who had asked Barr to write an "estimate" of Mather's work, including Modern Painting, Barr wrote "...I am both a former pupil and a friend of Mr. Mather, while at the same time I find myself in frequent disagreement with his opinions. For this reason I fear I cannot accept your invitation much as I admire the bulk of Mr. Mather's work."[5]

The two major areas of disagreement between Barr and Mather would seem to be their views on Matisse and Mather's aesthetics. As a student in 1920 Barr admired Matisse's work which he saw illustrated in The Dial.[6] Matisse was the first European artist to be given a one-man exhibition at MoMA, a show organized in 1931 with a catalog by Barr; and, in 1951, Barr wrote Matisse: His art and public, still considered the definitive monograph on this artist. This book by the way was dedicated to his professors, Sachs, Morey and Mather, to whom Barr credited his "method of study."[7] Mather did not share Barr's enthusiasm: "Fundamentally (Matisse) seems to me a fine draughtsman gone wrong...the paintings are garish and unsteady, spletched with conventionally sharp colors, like a tomato salad with mayonnaise..."[8] Mather's tendency to mix social and aesthetic elements when making a critical judgment about an artist led him to overpraise, for example, the work of Sargent and LaFarge, among others, because they lived properly: he wrote that "the problems of esthetics and simple (or elsewhere he uses the word "right") living lie near together and frequently overlap."[9] Barr, as we shall explain elsewhere, had no use for the aesthetic theories of contemporary art historians or

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journalists.

The second bibliographical source which Barr "highly" recommended to Wellesley alumnae for the study of nineteenth century art was Walter Pach's The Masters of Modern Art (New York: Huebsch; c. 1924). Pach's book surveys one hundred and fifty years of French painting from the Revolution (David) through World War I (Matisse); "masters" refers to those artists who, in Pach's opinion, gave new directions to art or who became leaders in its development. The thirty-six illustrations were carefully chosen and are analyzed in a special "Notes" section in language less stilted than is usually found in art books of this period; the bibliography seems thorough. A review which appeared in The Dial explained that this book "was written for those Americans...who are beginning to dimly suspect the grandeur of the intellectual drama which has been going on in the Occident for over a century." The Dial, by the way, was the main voice of the avant-garde in post-World War I America; it ceased publication in 1929 and was regularly read by Barr. Pach's academic and agreeable little survey was inexpensive ($3.50), well-received by art historians (Frank J. Mather's favorable comments can be read in The Saturday Review, November 29, 1924) and went to three editions before 1929. Six of the works illustrated are included in the Museum's collection. It is also interesting that Pach referred to photography as an art form, an opinion with which Barr concurred.

Modern French Painters (New York: Dodd; rev. ed. 1929) by Jan Gordon appealed to Barr who knew the first edition, which appeared in 1923. Barr found it "admirable" because of its "clear colloquial style

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and large, well-chosen collection of color plates. Color is essential to most modern painting, and no other book is so well-equipped to help the reader rectify the false impression made by too much study of photographs and half-tones."[11] This book does seem a period piece: it is wordy and somewhat monotonous; however, the writer, a painter, was sensitive and knowledgeable; he was aware of the different phases of modern art, he did not make quick judgments and he was open-minded in his praise and appreciation: for example, "Picasso may well be considered as the problem of modern art. He has bewildered the public by the variety of and the differences between his artistic phases. An exhibition of...Picassos looks like the work of a group of five or six men who have scarcely an obvious idea between them...(yet he has) some internal illuminant...Picasso's Cubism has definitely set the world's ideas of the art of painting upon a different basis."[12] Gordon chose to illustrate his open-minded remarks on Picasso with a color plate of a 1922 synthetic cubist painting, a group of three hefty neo-classic nudes and a faceted cubist painting.

Barr in the twenties admired the writings of the Englishmen Roger Fry (1866-1934) and Clive Bell (1881-1964), who together organized two important exhibitions of Post-Impressionist art (English and French) at London's Grafton Galleries in 1910-11 and 1913. "How did the public take it?" Clive Bell recalled in 1950 in a letter to Barr. "The howls of rage and shrieks of venemous laughter emitted by the cultivated public no less fiercely than by the general... Roger Fry was rumoured to have received threatening letters; certainly he was cut by old acquaintances... those who can remember the Armory Show a few years

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later in New York (will understand)."[13] By the time the show closed in January 1910, however, the London public had begun to appreciate art for "Fry's persuasive manner wrought miracles."[14] Barr agreed with Bell's opinion of Fry. In 1929 Barr wrote that "Roger Fry is unquestionably the foremost English art critic. His two volumes, Vision and Design (1920) and Transformations(1926), are remarkable for their breadth of interest, their clarity and reasonable enthusiasms;"[15] in Cézanne (1927) he "soberly and without alarums, analyzes for the public the work of the most influential of modern painters."[16] The conservative art critic Thomas Craven, reviewing the latter on page one of the "Books" section of the Sunday New York Herald Tribune (January 1, 1928), also appreciated Fry's essay: "Nothing has escaped his practised eye; and the assurance and clear-headed vigor with which he digs into the complexities of color and form should cause all readers to rejoice. Mr. Fry knows what he is talking about..." Fry, who became a critic at the turn of the century, was the first to interpret the post-impressionists and to stress the formal qualities in painting which he had learned to value through the study of cubism. He appreciated the idea that Cézanne created forms and that his pictures did not have a message or tell a story. Fry was, as was Barr throughout his life, very sympathetic to Matisse's artistic sensibilities; in his pioneering essay of 1928[17] Fry praised Matisse's line and color, called him a "distinguished" artist and wrote that he held a "singular" position in the tradition of European painting.[18]

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Clive Bell, almost twenty years younger than Fry, shared Fry's opinion that in viewing a work of art an æsthetic experience occurs which explains why art can be explained and understood in and of itself separate from all moral or social consideration. In Art, which appeared in 1914 and included only seven plates, Bell writes of "aesthetic ectasy;" he tried to appeal to the spiritual side of man:[19] "art is the one religion that is always shaping its form to fit the spirit... it is a religion without a priesthood... the new spirit is in the hands of the artists; that is well."[20] Bell's book, less than absorbing reading to us today, is important because art students in the teens and twenties in America read and knew his viewpoint.

Sheldon Cheney's A Primer of Modern Art (New York: Boni & Liveright; c. 1924) was important for two reasons: it included 175 illustrations, and the clear text discussed not only sculpture and painting but also architecture, the theatre and decorative arts in Germany, Russia and Italy as well as in France, England and America. Aside from Katherine Dreier's Western Art and the New Era (New York: Brentano; c. 1923), which reflected her personal thoughts on some of the Germans and Russians mentioned by Cheney, the only book published in America at this time which objectively analyzed the international scope of the modern movement was Cheney's.[21] He suggested that the American public, which by 1924 had hardly warmed up to Post-Impressionism, might be unable to appreciate properly the art of its time because it had been educated to believe that art had to be realistic, photographic,

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tell a story or have a moral; i.e., anything but that it be creative. For the first time an American art critic told the public that art can be related to life not by surface imitation but by its concern with expression. Lower Manhattan, by John Marin, one of Cheney's favorites, has "the quality that is the essence of modern creative painting."[22] In it, Cheney explained, Marin is expressing the intensity in modern life and the success with which the artist accomplished this should be the basis of our judgment. In reading this account of modern art one is amazed that so many of the artists mentioned and praised by Cheney have been forgotten long ago--today they are unknowns; the phases of art history chosen by Cheney as interesting to the modernist in 1924 are more valuable today to a history of taste than to a history of art. Throughout his book Cheney refers to past art (objects and buildings) which might have inspired the artists about whom he was writing. Alfred Barr shared this view. Barr believed that in order to understand the art of our time we must prepare ourselves; an appreciation of modern art could be acquired only after we were equipped with a solid knowledge of the art of the past; such knowledge, Barr felt, enabled one to understand what the modern artist admired and where his visual experiences came from.[23]

In The Art of Painting by Albert C. Barnes (New York: Harcourt; 1926) the author wrote that the study of painting consists in nothing more than the determination of how successfully the artist has integrated the plastic means to create a form which is powerful and

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expressive of his personality, and that "relevant judgment or criticism of a picture involves the ability to abstract from the appeal of the subject-matter, and consider only the plastic means..."[24] Reviewing this book for The Saturday Review Barr criticized Barnes for his emphasis on "plastic" values (i.e., analyzing a painting on the basis of color, line, mass and space) to the exclusion of subject matter, historical placement and stylistic variation. Barr thought Barnes' opinions "extreme."[25] Barnes applied his dialectic to works by old masters (Giotto, Pierro della Francesca and El Greco, among others) as well as to "the moderns"--the Post-Impressionists, Picasso, Matisse, Soutine and Modigliani are discussed. Barr found the text "ponderous," was annoyed by Barnes' lack of respect for fact, and did not share many of his tastes. For example, Barnes' arbitrary attitude towards Vermeer's compositions must have infuriated Barr. From letters written by Barr during the academic year 1921-22 it is clear that he greatly admired Vermeer's compositions, which he felt anticipated effects found in works by Degas.[26] Barnes never forgave Barr his remarks. In 1951 when Barr was arranging the plate section for his monograph on Matisse, Barnes threatened the Museum of Modern Art with a lawsuit if they reproduced any works from his collection which Barr, in 1926, had called "the finest collection of modern paintings in America."[27] Although in 1926 Barr recommended Barnes' book as a "trustworthy" introduction to modern art,[28] he did not mention it among his 1928 and 1929 Vassar and Wellesley suggestions.

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Alfred Barr did not believe that the philosophy of aesthetics contributed very much to an understanding of modern art. Perhaps this was because when writers of the twenties (be it Barnes or Bell) tried to explain aesthetic theory they usually began with the assumption that their own personal tastes and intuitions were correct. To explain art and give it a philosophic or theoretical basis Barr turned to Jacques Maritain's Philosophy of Art. (Barr knew the English edition translated from the French Art et scholasticism by John O'Connor with introduction by Eric Gill: London: B. Humphries; 1923.) "For those who really wish to think about art (Maritain's book) will prove a very noble stimulant... In this small book the author discovers for us the light thrown by the penetrating orderly thought of medieval philosophy upon art and aesthetic theories of our own bewildered age, stricken (sic) by war, and by peace, and recoiling bitterly from the optimistic naturalism of the last century."[28] Barr believed that just as the Christians in the middle ages looked to the religious motif in its variety of forms (he was steeped in early Christian iconography) to produce medieval art, we in the twentieth century have to use the fundamental symbolism inspired by the characteristics of our own epoch. Whether this symbolism was the wheel or machine of the futurists, an automobile or the image of Marilyn Monroe, Barr could turn to Maritain's philosophy as the basis for an appreciation of art truth and/or beauty. Maritain, a Protestant, and his wife, a Jew, found in Catholicism a sense of order based on ancient thought and Christian theology; he often quoted artists. Barr was not a

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religious man in the traditional sense--his religion was giving modern art a sense of order; indeed, he put modern art in order for the first time. Like Maritain, he went about his task with great tolerance; he, too, frequently quoted artists. Maritain believed that there is a universal order within which our intelligence is free to see and inquire. Barr learned his lessons early and well; discipline and orderly thought were characteristics of his lifetime of achievement.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Lynes, Russell. Good Old Modern: an intimate portrait of the Museum of Modern Art. New York: Atheneum; 1973, p. 27.

2. Letters referred to throughout this paper can be found in the Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Archive, Museum of Modern Art Library; they can be read in microfilm in New York at the Archives of American Art beginning with roll no. 2164.

3. Disclosures made by Mrs. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to Rona Roob, March 1982.

4. Unpublished personal diary, property of Mrs. Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

5. Letter to Henry S. Canby, November 27, 1931; see footnote #2.

6. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Archive, Museum of Modern Art Library, Matisse Papers III.D.

7. Ibid., Matisse Papers I.D.1.

8. Mather, Frank J. Modern Painting. New York: Holt; c. 1927, pp. 358-359.

9. Ibid., p. 380.

10. Letter from Barr to A. Conger Goodyear, August 11, 1941; see footnote #2.

11. Barr, Alfred H. "Understanding Modern Art." Wellesley Alumnae Magazine. 13 (5): 304; 1929 June.

12. Gordon, Jan. Modern French Painting. New York: Dodd, Mead; 1923; 139-140 ff.

13. Barr Archive (op. cit.) Matisse Papers I.A.4.

14. Ibid.

15. Wellesley Alumnae Magazine, op. cit., p. 305.

16. (Barr, Alfred H., Jr.) Bookshopping. Poughkeepsie, New York: Vassar Co-operative Bookshop; 1928-1929, p. 16.

17. "Matisse and the Renewal of Plastic Expression." Creative Art. 9:459-62; 1931 December. This essay was printed and available in England where Barr visited in 1927-28.

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Footnotes (continued)

18. Ibid., p. 461.

19. It is interesting that Kandinsky's Über das Geistige in der Kunst (original German edition, 1912) was first published in English translation by Michael Sadlier under the title The Art of Spiritual Harmony in London and Boston in 1914.

20. Bell, Clive. Art. New York: Stokes; 1914, p. 278 ff.

21. Drier's importance to this era of art history and her relevance to the education of Alfred Barr is considerable: the series of avant-garde exhibitions which she presented through her organization, the Société Anonyme, were seen by countless Americans and received wide publicity; Barr knew her personally, first in 1923 when he presented a Société Anonyme show at Vassar, and later in 1927 when he was at Wellesley; as a matter of fact, Barr sent Dreier a postcard from the Bauhaus where he visited for four days in 1927. They remained friends until Miss Dreier's death in 1952. Indeed, the Dreier/Barr relationship is subject enough for another paper.

22. Cheney, Sheldon. A Primer of Modern Art. New York: Boni & Liveright; c. 1924, p. 35.

23. Wellesley Alumnae Magazine, op. cit., p. 304. Barr installed MoMA's collection with this idea in mind. For example, in 1932 he hung a Modigliani flanked by two masks from the Ivory Coast in MoMA exh. #17, Summer Exhibition: Painting and Sculpture.

24. Barnes, Albert C. The Art in Painting. New York: Harcourt; c. 1926, p. 72.

25. Barr, Alfred H., Jr. "Plastic Values." (Review of The Art in Painting by Albert C. Barnes.) The Saturday Review of Literature. 2(52): 948; 1926 July 24.

26. See footnote #2.

27. "Plastic Values," op. cit.

28. Wellesley Alumnae Magazine, op. cit., p. 305 and Bookshopping (Vassar), op. cit., p. 17.

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Bell, Clive. Art. New York: Stokes; 1914. 293 p. Illus.

Faure, Elie. "A Book on Modern Art." (Review of The Masters of Modern Art by Walter Pach.) The Dial. 77:509-512; 1924 December.

Frankl, Paul T. New Dimensions; the decorative arts of today in words and pictures. New York: Payson & Clarke; 1928. 80 p. 122 illus. (Note: Illustrations mostly of furniture, fabrics and interiors; good source for information on taste of the period.)

Fry, Roger E. Cézanne: a study of his development. New York: Noonday; c. 1958 (with introduction by Alfred Werner). 88 p. Illus. (Note: first published August 1927, by Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press; Barr knew New York: Macmillan; 1927 edition.)

Fry, Roger E. Transformations: critical and speculative essays on art. New York: Doubleday; 1956. (Note: originally published August, 1926.)

Fry, Roger E. "Matisse and the Renewal of Plastic Expressions." Creative Art. 9:459-62; 1931 December. (Note: this essay was written in 1928 and printed in England, where Barr spent many months in 1927-28; Barr met Fry at this time.)

Fry, Roger E. Vision and Design. New York: Meridian; 1956. (Note: originally published December 9, 1920.)

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Lynes, Russell. Good Old Modern: an intimate portrait of the Museum of Modern Art. New York: Atheneum; 1973. xvi, 490 p. Index, pp. 471-490. (Note: the basic text on MoMA, especially reliable for information on the early years.)

MacDonald, Dwight. "Action on West fifty-third Street." The New Yorker. 29(43): 49-82; 1953 December 12 and 29(44): 35-72; 1953 December 19. (Note: this two-part "profile" is most detailed biography of AHB available.)

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Park, Edwin Avery. New backgrounds for a new age. New York: Harcourt, Brace; 1927. 222 pp. Illus. Index, pp. 223-225.

Seligmann, Herbert J. "Primer of Modern Art" (Review of Sheldon Cheney's A Primer of Modern Art.) New York Herald Tribune. Sect. 11:21; 1924 June 29.

Sullivan, Malachy. Contemporary Catholic Authors: Jacques Maritain, Christian Humanist. 12 p. (Reprinted from The Catholic Library World. Catholic Library Association, May, 1942.)

very well done & most interesting to read

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The Museum of Modern Art

To Clive Phillpot

From Rona Roob

Date June 9, 1982

Re

Dear Clive,

The following books on modern art available before the Museum opened in 1929 and referred to by AHB in his early writings are not included in our Library. Barr recommended these to Vassar and Wellesley students and alumnae. As indicated below they can be read elsewhere in NYC.

Pearson, Ralph M. How to see modern pictures. NY: Dial, 1925. [available only at NYPL]

Vollard, Ambroise. Paul Cézanne, his life and art. Trans. by H. L. van Dorem. Frank-Maurice, 1926. [only Avery has this edition]

Vollard, Ambroise. Degas, an intimate portrait. Trans. by R. T. Weaver. NY: Greenburg, c. 1927. [available at MMA; this is the authorized translation]

Vollard, Ambroise. Renoir, an intimate record. Trans. by K. L. van Dorem and R. T. Weaver. NY: Knopf, 1925. [also at MMA]

Youtz, Philip N., editor. An Outline of Aesthetics, NY: Norton, c. 1928. [5 separate little books, each not more than 5" x 7" and each with introduction by Youtz]

Allen, M. Cecil. The Mirror of the Passing World. (painting) 102 p.

Erdman, Irwin. The World, the Arts and the Artist. (philosophy) 88 p.

Ladd, Henry. With Eyes of the Past. (art) 100p

Munro, Thomas. Scientific Method in Aesthetics. (aesthetics and psychology) 101 p. [among other things Munro was a Barnes-boy and editor of The Chapbook with which AHB was familiar]

Wells, Henry. The Judgment of Literature. (literary criticism)

If some day you ever came across an early edition (preferably in the original french which is easy and rather poetic) of Maritain's Philosophy of Art it would nice to have in the Lib. We have Maritain's Art and Poetry, NY: Philosophical Library, c. 1943.

R.

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A selection of books on modern art available to

Alfred Barr in the 1920s

Rona Roob
Literature of the Fine Arts
Professor Thompson
April 1982

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In July, 1929, Professor Paul J. Sachs of Harvard recommended to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (Mrs. John D., Jr.) that Alfred H. Barr, Jr., then Associate Professor of the History of Art at Wellesley College, be considered for the position of director of the new museum devoted to modern art which she, Miss Lillie P. Bliss and Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan had organized. At Wellesley, Barr had been teaching the first course in America which comprehensively synthesized the modern visual arts--painting, sculpture, architecture, graphics, the cinema and industrial design; this course, in fact, anticipated the multi-departmental plan of the Museum of Modern Art. Sachs had been impressed with Barr as a graduate student in 1924: "... he (Barr) thought deeply and ranged widely on the whole field of art..."[1] Mrs. Rockefeller, five years later, agreed with Sachs' assessment and Barr became the first Director of the new Museum. (Russell Lynes' book, Good Old Modern: an intimate portrait of the Museum of Modern Art (New York: Atheneum, 1973; chapter 2) and Dwight MacDonald's "profile" of Barr in The New Yorker (29(43):49-82 and 29(44):35-72; 12 and 19 December 1953) are reliable sources for early MoMA history and Alfred Barr's background.) Barr began to write immediately about and for the new Museum: by August 1929 MoMA's first publication appeared, a pamphlet which explained in broad terms the Museum's purpose; three months later, in November, MoMA's first exhibition, Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and van Gogh, opened with a catalog by Barr. In a letter to A. Conger Goodyear some years later (August 11, 1941) Barr wrote: "As an undergraduate, graduate student and instructor at Princeton and Harvard

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my interest in modern art was almost entirely extracurricular (except for a term paper on modern prints prepared for Professor Sachs). Two academic tendencies did, however, provoke in me a strong reaction--one who was the general ignorance of or contempt for 20th century art on the part of most of my teachers... During these years I made both friends and enemies by advocating more attention...to modern art..."[2] What books on modern art were available in America in the 1920s? Which of these are relevant to Barr's perception of modern art in the years before 1929 when the museum was founded?

In an article called "Understanding Modern Art" published in The Wellesley Alumnae Magazine (13(5): 304-035; 1929 June), Barr recommended that those interested in nineteenth century painting consult Frank J. Mather's Modern Painting (New York: Holt; c. 1927). The book does cover modern art through the 1920s. In his Wellesley piece Barr describes Mather as a distinguished humanist who in this book is "insufficiently sympathetic" to the art of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Mather's book was an expanded and revised (11/26) edition of lectures delivered in 1916; "the two chapters on Modernism are new" (verso of title page). Barr and Mather enjoyed a close relationship at Princeton; Mather, who taught Italian and Northern painting, has been described as "breezy and conversational;" he allowed smoking in class;[3] furthermore, Mather was writing and talking informally about contemporary art in 1920-21. In his diary on May 25, 1921, during his junior year at Princeton, Barr wrote "take father to Professor Mather's lecture of (sic) the cubists and synchromists... excellent, Mather clever..."[4] However, in a personal letter of 1931

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to the editor of The Saturday Review who had asked Barr to write an "estimate" of Mather's work, including Modern Painting, Barr wrote "...I am both a former pupil and a friend of Mr. Mather, while at the same time I find myself in frequent disagreement with his opinions. For this reason I fear I cannot accept your invitation much as I admire the bulk of Mr. Mather's work."[5]

The two major areas of disagreement between Barr and Mather would seem to be their views on Matisse and Mather's æsthetics. As a student in 1920 Barr admired Matisse's work which he saw illustrated in The Dial.[6] Matisse was the first European artist to be given a one-man exhibition at MoMA, a show organized in 1931 with a catalog by Barr; and, in 1951, Barr wrote Matisse: His art and public, still considered the definitive monograph on this artist. This book by the way was dedicated to his professors, Sachs, Morey and Mather, to whom Barr credited his "method of study."[7] Mather did not share Barr's enthusiasm: "Fundamentally (Matisse) seems to me a fine draughtsman gone wrong...the paintings are garish and unsteady, splotched with conventionally sharp colors, like a tomato salad with mayonnaise..."[8] Mather's tendency to mix social and æsthetic elements when making a critical judgment about an artist led him to overpraise, for example, the work of Sargent and LaFarge, among others, because they lived properly: he wrote that "the problems of esthetics and simple (or elsewhere he uses the word "right") living lie near together and frequently overlap."[9] Barr, as we shall explain elsewhere, had no use for the aesthetic theories of contemporary art historians or

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journalists.

The second bibliographical source which Barr "highly" recommended to Wellesley alumnae for the study of nineteenth century art was Walter Pach's The Masters of Modern Art (New York: Huebsch; c. 1924). Pach's book surveys one hundred and fifty years of French painting from the Revolution (David) through World War I (Matisse); "masters" refers to those artists who, in Pach's opinion, gave new directions to art or who became leaders in its development. The thirty-six illustrations were carefully chosen and are analyzed in a special "Notes" section in language less stilted than is usually found in art books of this period; the bibliography seems thorough. A review which appeared in The Dial explained that this book "was written for those Americans...who are beginning to dimly suspect the grandeur of the intellectual drama which has been going on in the Occident for over a century." The Dial, by the way, was the main voice of the avant-garde in post-World War I America; it ceased publication in 1929 and was regularly read by Barr. 10 Pach's academic and agreeable little survey was inexpensive ($3.50), well-received by art historians (Frank J. Mather's favorable comments can be read in The Saturday Review, November 29, 1924) and went to three editions before 1929. Six of the works illustrated are included in the Museum's collection. It is also interesting that Pach referred to photography as an art form, an opinion with which Barr concurred.

IS - NOT SO -

Modern French Painters (New York: Dodd; rev. ed. 1929) by Jan Gordon appealed to Barr who knew the first edition, which appeared in 1923. Barr found it "admirable" because of its "clear colloquial style

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and large, well-chosen collection of color plates. Color is essential to most modern painting, and no other book is so well-equipped to help the reader rectify the false impression made by too much study of photographs and half-tones."[11] This book does seem a period piece: it is wordy and somewhat monotonous; however, the writer, a painter, was sensitive and knowledgeable; he was aware of the different phases of modern art, he did not make quick judgments and he was open-minded in his praise and appreciation: for example, "Picasso may well be considered as the problem of modern art. He has bewildered the public by the variety of and the differences between his artistic phases. An exhibition of...Picassos looks like the work of a group of five or six men who have scarcely an obvious idea between them...(yet he has) some internal illuminant...Picasso's Cubism has definitely set the world's ideas of the art of painting upon a different basis."[12] Gordon chose to illustrate his open-minded remarks on Picasso with a color plate of a 1922 synthetic cubist painting, a group of three hefty neo-classic nudes and a faceted cubist painting.

Barr in the twenties admired the writings of the Englishmen Roger Fry (1866-1934) and Clive Bell (1881-1964), who together organized two important exhibitions of Post-Impressionist art (English and French) at London's Grafton Galleries in 1910-11 and 1913. "How did the public take it?" Clive Bell recalled in 1950 in a letter to Barr. "The howls of rage and shrieks of venemous laughter emitted by the cultivated public no less fiercely than by the general... Roger Fry was rumoured to have received threatening letters; certainly he was cut by old acquaintances... those who can remember the Armory Show a few years

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later in New York (will understand)."[13] By the time the show closed in January 1910, however, the London public had begun to appreciate art for "Fry's persuasive manner wrought miracles."[14] Barr agreed with Bell's opinion of Fry. In 1929 Barr wrote that "Roger Fry is unquestionably the foremost English art critic. His two volumes, Vision and Design (1920) and Transformations (1926), are remarkable for their breadth of interest, their clarity and reasonable enthusiasms;"[15] in Cézanne (1927) he "soberly and without alarums, analyzes for the public the work of the most influential of modern painters."[16] The conservative art critic Thomas Craven, reviewing the latter on page one of the "Books" section of the Sunday New York Herald Tribune (January 1, 1928), also appreciated Fry's essay: "Nothing has escaped his practised eye; and the assurance and clear-headed vigor with which he digs into the complexities of color and form should cause all readers to rejoice. Mr. Fry knows what he is talking about..." Fry, who became a critic at the turn of the century, was the first to interpret the post-impressionists and to stress the formal qualities in painting which he had learned to value through the study of cubism. He appreciated the idea that Cézanne created forms and that his pictures did not have a message or tell a story. Fry was, as was Barr throughout his life, very sympathetic to Matisse's artistic sensibilities; in his pioneering essay of 1928[17] Fry praised Matisse's line and color, called him a "distinguished" artist and wrote that he held a "singular" position in the tradition of European painting.[18]

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Clive Bell, almost twenty years younger than Fry, shared Fry's opinion that in viewing a work of art an æsthetic experience occurs which explains why art can be explained and understood in and of itself separate from all moral or social consideration. In Art, which appeared in 1914 and included only seven plates, Bell writes of "aesthetic ectasy;" he tried to appeal to the spiritual side of man:[19] "art is the one religion that is always shaping its form to fit the spirit... it is a religion without a priesthood... the new spirit is in the hands of the artists; that is well."[20] Bell's book, less than absorbing reading to us today, is important because art students in the teens and twenties in America read and knew his viewpoint.

Sheldon Cheney's A Primer of Modern Art (New York: Boni & Liveright; c. 1924) was important for two reasons: it included 175 illustrations, and the clear text discussed not only sculpture and painting but also architecture, the theatre and decorative arts in Germany, Russia and Italy as well as in France, England and America. Aside from Katherine Dreier's Western Art and the New Era (New York: Brentano; c. 1923), which reflected her personal thoughts on some of the Germans and Russians mentioned by Cheney, the only book published in America at this time which objectively analyzed the international scope of the modern movement was Cheney's.[21] He suggested that the American public, which by 1924 had hardly warmed up to Post-Impressionism, might be unable to appreciate properly the art of its time because it had been educated to believe that art had to be realistic, photographic,

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tell a story or have a moral; i.e., anything but that it be creative. For the first time an American art critic told the public that art can be related to life not by surface imitation but by its concern with expression. Lower Manhattan, by John Marin, one of Cheney's favorites, has "the quality that is the essence of modern creative painting."[22] In it, Cheney explained, Marin is expressing the intensity in modern life and the success with which the artist accomplished this should be the basis of our judgment. In reading this account of modern art one is amazed that so many of the artists mentioned and praised by Cheney have been forgotten long ago--today they are unknowns; the phases of art history chosen by Cheney as interesting to the modernist in 1924 are more valuable today to a history of taste than to a history of art. Throughout his book Cheney refers to past art (objects and buildings) which might have inspired the artists about whom he was writing. Alfred Barr shared this view. Barr believed that in order to understand the art of our time we must prepare ourselves; an appreciation of modern art could be acquired only after we were equipped with a solid knowledge of the art of the past; such knowledge, Barr felt, enabled one to understand what the modern artist admired and where his visual experiences came from.[23]

In The Art of Painting by Albert C. Barnes (New York: Harcourt; 1926) the author wrote that the study of painting consists in nothing more than the determination of how successfully the artist has integrated the plastic means to create a form which is powerful and

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expressive of his personality, and that "relevant judgment or criticism of a picture involves the ability to abstract from the appeal of the subject-matter, and consider only the plastic means..."[24] Reviewing this book for The Saturday Review Barr criticized Barnes for his emphasis on "plastic" values (i.e., analyzing a painting on the basis of color, line, mass and space) to the exclusion of subject matter, historical placement and stylistic variation. Barr thought Barnes' opinions "extreme."[25] Barnes applied his dialectic to works by old masters (Giotto, Piero della Francesca and El Greco, among others) as well as to "the moderns"--the Post-Impressionists, Picasso, Matisse, Soutine and Modigliani are discussed. Barr found the text "ponderous," was annoyed by Barnes' lack of respect for fact, and did not share many of his tastes. For example, Barnes' arbitrary attitude towards Vermeer's compositions must have infuriated Barr. From letters written by Barr during the academic year 1921-22 it is clear that he greatly admired Vermeer's compositions, which he felt anticipated effects found in works by Degas.[26] Barnes never forgave Barr his remarks. In 1951 when Barr was arranging the plate section for his monograph on Matisse, Barnes threatened the Museum of Modern Art with a lawsuit if they reproduced any works from his collection which Barr, in 1926, had called "the finest collection of modern paintings in America."[27] Although in 1926 Barr recommended Barnes' book as a "trustworthy" introduction to modern art,[28] he did not mention it among his 1928 and 1929 Vassar and Wellesley suggestions.

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Alfred Barr did not believe that the philosophy of aesthetics contributed very much to an understanding of modern art. Perhaps this was because when writers of the twenties (be it Barnes or Bell) tried to explain aesthetic theory they usually began with the assumption that their own personal tastes and intuitions were correct. To explain art and give it a philosophic or theoretical basis Barr turned to Jacques Maritain's Philosophy of Art. (Barr knew the English edition translated from the French Art et scholasticism by John O'Connor with introduction by Eric Gill: London: B. Humphries; 1923.) "For those who really wish to think about art (Maritain's book) will prove a very noble stimulant... In this small book the author discovers for us the light thrown by the penetrating orderly thought of medieval philosophy upon art and aesthetic theories of our own bewildered age, stricken (sic) by war, and by peace, and recoiling bitterly from the optimistic naturalism of the last century."[28] Barr believed that just as the Christians in the middle ages looked to the religious motif in its variety of forms (he was steeped in early Christian iconography) to produce medieval art, we in the twentieth century have to use the fundamental symbolism inspired by the characteristics of our own epoch. Whether this symbolism was the wheel or machine of the futurists, an automobile or the image of Marilyn Monroe, Barr could turn to Maritain's philosophy as the basis for an appreciation of art truth and/or beauty. Maritain, a Protestant, and his wife, a Jew, found in Catholicism a sense of order based on ancient thought and Christian theology; he often quoted artists. Barr was not a

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religious man in the traditional sense--his religion was giving modern art a sense of order; indeed, he put modern art in order for the first time. Like Maritain, he went about his task with great tolerance; he, too, frequently quoted artists. Maritain believed that there is a universal order within which our intelligence is free to see and inquire. Barr learned his lessons early and well; discipline and orderly thought were characteristics of his lifetime of achievement.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Lynes, Russell. Good Old Modern: an intimate portrait of the Museum of Modern Art. New York: Atheneum; 1973, p. 27.

2. Letters referred to throughout this paper can be found in the Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Archive, Museum of Modern Art Library; they can be read in microfilm in New York at the Archives of American Art beginning with roll no. 2164.

3. Disclosures made by Mrs. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to Rona Roob, March 1982.

4. Unpublished personal diary, property of Mrs. Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

5. Letter to Henry S. Canby, November 27, 1931; see footnote #2.

6. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Archive, Museum of Modern Art Library, Matisse Papers III.D.

7. Ibid., Matisse Papers I.D.1.

8. Mather, Frank J. Modern Painting. New York: Holt; c. 1927, pp. 358-359.

9. Ibid., p. 380.

10. Letter from Barr to A. Conger Goodyear, August 11, 1941; see footnote #2.

11. Barr, Alfred H. "Understanding Modern Art." Wellesley Alumnae Magazine. 13 (5): 304; 1929 June.

12. Gordon, Jan. Modern French Painting. New York: Dodd, Mead; 1923; 139-140 ff.

13. Barr Archive (op. cit.) Matisse Papers I.A.4.

14. Ibid.

15. Wellesley Alumnae Magazine, op. cit., p. 305.

16. (Barr, Alfred H., Jr.) Bookshopping. Poughkeepsie, New York: Vassar Co-operative Bookshop; 1928-1929, p. 16.

17. "Matisse and the Renewal of Plastic Expression." Creative Art. 9:459-62; 1931 December. This essay was printed and available in England where Barr visited in 1927-28.

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Footnotes (continued)

18. Ibid., p. 461.

19. It is interesting that Kandinsky's Über das Geistige in der Kunst (original German edition, 1912) was first published in English translation by Michael Sadlier under the title The Art of Spiritual Harmony in London and Boston in 1914.

20. Bell, Clive. Art. New York: Stokes; 1914, p. 278 ff.

21. Drier's importance to this era of art history and her relevance to the education of Alfred Barr is considerable: the series of avant-garde exhibitions which she presented through her organization, the Société Anonyme, were seen by countless Americans and received wide publicity; Barr knew her personally, first in 1923 when he presented a Société Anonyme show at Vassar, and later in 1927 when he was at Wellesley; as a matter of fact, Barr sent Dreier a postcard from the Bauhaus where he visited for four days in 1927. They remained friends until Miss Dreier's death in 1952. Indeed, the Dreier/Barr relationship is subject enough for another paper.

22. Cheney, Sheldon. A Primer of Modern Art. New York: Boni & Liveright; c. 1924, p. 35.

23. Wellesley Alumnae Magazine, op. cit., p. 304. Barr installed MoMA's collection with this idea in mind. For example, in 1932 he hung a Modigliani flanked by two masks from the Ivory Coast in MoMA exh. #17, Summer Exhibition: Painting and Sculpture.

24. Barnes, Albert C. The Art in Painting. New York: Harcourt; c. 1926, p. 72.

25. Barr, Alfred H., Jr. "Plastic Values." (Review of The Art in Painting by Albert C. Barnes.) The Saturday Review of Literature. 2(52): 948; 1926 July 24.

26. See footnote #2.

27. "Plastic Values," op. cit.

28. Wellesley Alumnae Magazine, op. cit., p. 305 and Bookshopping (Vassar), op. cit., p. 17.

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Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, geb. in Rottluff (Bezirk Chemnitz) am 1. Dezember 1884. Er schwankte zunächst bei Beginn seiner künstlerischen Laufbahn zwischen Malerei und Architektur, um sich dann der bildenden Kunst zuzuwenden. Er hielt sich 1905 und 1906 in Dresden auf und schloß sich dort der ursprünglichen „Brücke"-Gruppe der Bleyl, Kirchner und Heckel an. Den Sommer 1906 brachte er in der Nähe Noldes auf Alsen zu; späterhin (bis 1912) verlebte er die Sommerzeit zum Teil in Gemeinschaft mit den anderen Mitgliedern der „Brücke" in Dangastermoor, bezw. Dangast. Er lebt jetzt in Berlin-Friedenau. — Aufsätze im „Kunstblatt", I. Bd. — „Cicerone" 1918.

*

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„Die Aktion", herausgegeben von Fr. Pfemfert, Berlin.
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56. Diaz - Toreadors (M. Sterner)
57. Figari - Group (M. Sterner)
58. Zubiaurre - At Cards (Dudensing)
59. Zubiaurre - Mayor of Sepulvaba (Dudensing)
60. Gustavo de Maeztu - Pastel (Mrs. Vernon)
61. Palencia - Segovia (Mrs. Vernon)

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33. Peri - Room (Soc.Anon.)
34. Moholy-Nagy - G. IV. 1926 (Soc.Anon.)
35. Moholy-Nagy - Z. V. 1926. (Soc.Anon.)

Italian:

36. Severini - Still Life (M. Sterner)
37. Severini - Red Cross Train (Neumann)
38. Severini - Dancer (Neumann)
39. Canade - Landscape (Weyhe)
40. Canade - Portrait (Weyhe)
41. Dottori - Sympathy (Soc. Anon.)
42. De Chirico - The Lovers (Soc. Anon.)

Japanese:

43. Fougita - Nude (M. Sterner)

Norwegian:

44. Ranghild Keyser - Composition I. (Soc. Anon.)
45. Ranghild Keyser - Composition II.(Soc. Anon.)

Polish:

46. Marcoussis - Painting on Glass, frame by Pierre Legrain (Soc. Anon.)
47. Mme Halicka - Baigneuses (Soc. Anon.)

Russian:

48. Simkovitch - Mme X. (M. Sterner)
49. Lissitzky - Proun 2 P.R. (Soc. Anon.)
50. Lissitzky - L.N. 31 (Soc. Anon.)
51. Kandinsky - Weisser Punkt (Soc. Anon.)
52. Kandinsky - Small Yellow (Soc. Anon.)
53. Kandinsky - Abstract Interpretation (Soc. Anon.)

Spanish:

54. Picasso - Painting (Wildenstein)
55. Gris - Abstraction in Yellow and Blue I. (Soc. Anon.)
56. Diaz - Toreadors (M. Sterner)
57. Figari - Group (M. Sterner)
58. Zubiaurre - At Cards (Dudensing)
59. Zubiaurre - Mayor of Sepulvaba (Dudensing)
60. Gustavo de Maeztu - Pastel (Mrs. Vernon)
61. Palencia - Segovia (Mrs. Vernon)