

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
August 1988

MONROE WHEELER (1899-1988)

Monday, August 15, 1988. . . . Trustee Emeritus Monroe Wheeler, who was deeply involved in the activities of The Museum of Modern Art for over five decades, died yesterday in New York City at the age of eighty-nine. Mr. Wheeler was honored by the Museum earlier this spring with the dedication of the Monroe Wheeler Reading Room in the Prints and Illustrated Books Galleries. Formerly Director of Publications and Exhibitions, he was a member of the Museum's Board of Trustees from 1945 to the present.

Born in 1899 in Evanston, Illinois, Monroe Wheeler was active as a writer and publisher in the United States and abroad during the twenties. From 1929 to 1935 he was cofounder and partner in the publishing firm of Harrison of Paris, which commissioned work by leading writers and artists for its limited editions. During this period he became acquainted with the celebrated publisher and dealer Ambroise Vollard, who had originally commissioned many of the greatest modern artists--including Picasso, Renoir, Bonnard, and Chagall--to produce limited editions of prints, bronzes, and illustrated books.

Returning to the United States in 1935, Mr. Wheeler became affiliated with the then six-year-old Museum of Modern Art, as the organizer of an exhibition of the bookbindings of Ignatz Wiemeler. He subsequently became a member of the Library Committee (1935), the Advisory Committee (1937), Director of Membership (1938), Director of Publications (1939), Director of Exhibitions (1940), Trustee (1945), Honorary Trustee for life (1966), and Counsellor to the Board of Trustees (1967).

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As Director of Publications and Exhibitions, Mr. Wheeler supervised the publication of more than 350 books on the visual arts. Some of these were illustrated in the Vollard tradition, and more than a score of them received awards for design. An article in the June 1964 issue of Apollo stated that Monroe Wheeler "has literally transformed the image of the modern art book, owing to his astute knowledge of typography, layout, reproduction techniques, and fine art printing. Under his directorship, a Museum of Modern Art publication has come to mean the highest standard in art-book production."

Mr. Wheeler worked closely with Edward Steichen to produce the landmark publication, The Family of Man, first published in 1955. He also commissioned such classics as John Rewald's The History of Impressionism (1946) and Post-Impressionism: From Gauguin to Cézanne (1956).

Mr. Wheeler directed or codirected many major exhibitions for the Museum, among them MODERN PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS AS ILLUSTRATORS (1936), which included many books published by Ambroise Vollard, and retrospectives of the work of Rouault, Soutine, Bonnard, Matisse, and Turner. He was the author of a number of publications issued in connection with these and other exhibitions directed by him, including MODERN DRAWINGS and TWENTIETH CENTURY PORTRAITS. As a member of the Museum's International Council, Mr. Wheeler directed the exhibition CEZANNE TO MIRO, which the Council sent to Buenos Aires, Santiago, and Caracas in 1968. Seen by 500,000 visitors over a period of ten weeks, the exhibition had the highest attendance ever attained at that time by a Museum exhibition in New York or elsewhere.

Mr. Wheeler numbered poets and writers, as well as artists, among his closest friends. At the Museum he was instrumental in arranging such special events as the first performance in this country of Dame Edith Sitwell's Facade,

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recited by the poet, in 1949, and a series of poetry readings in the same year by W.H. Auden, E.E. Cummings, Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams.

During World War II Monroe Wheeler served under Nelson A. Rockefeller as Chairman of the Committee on Publications for the Office of Inter-American Affairs. His many other activities included membership on the Publications Committee of UNESCO, Paris, and on the Visual Arts Advisory Committee of the Center for Inter-American Relations. He was a Trustee of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, a Trustee and First Vice President of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, a Trustee of the Katherine Anne Porter Foundation and of the Ben Shahn Foundation, and President of the International Graphic Arts Society. A member of the Council of the Grolier Club, he headed its publication committee for six years. He was also a member of the Advisory Board for Research and Graduate Education at Rutgers University. A Life Member of the French Institute of the United States, he was in 1950 awarded the Order of the Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor in recognition of "his outstanding services to the cause of French contemporary art in the United States."

Mr. Wheeler is survived by his brother, Richard Wheeler, of Evanston, Illinois, and sister, Doris Bach, of Madison, Wisconsin.

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