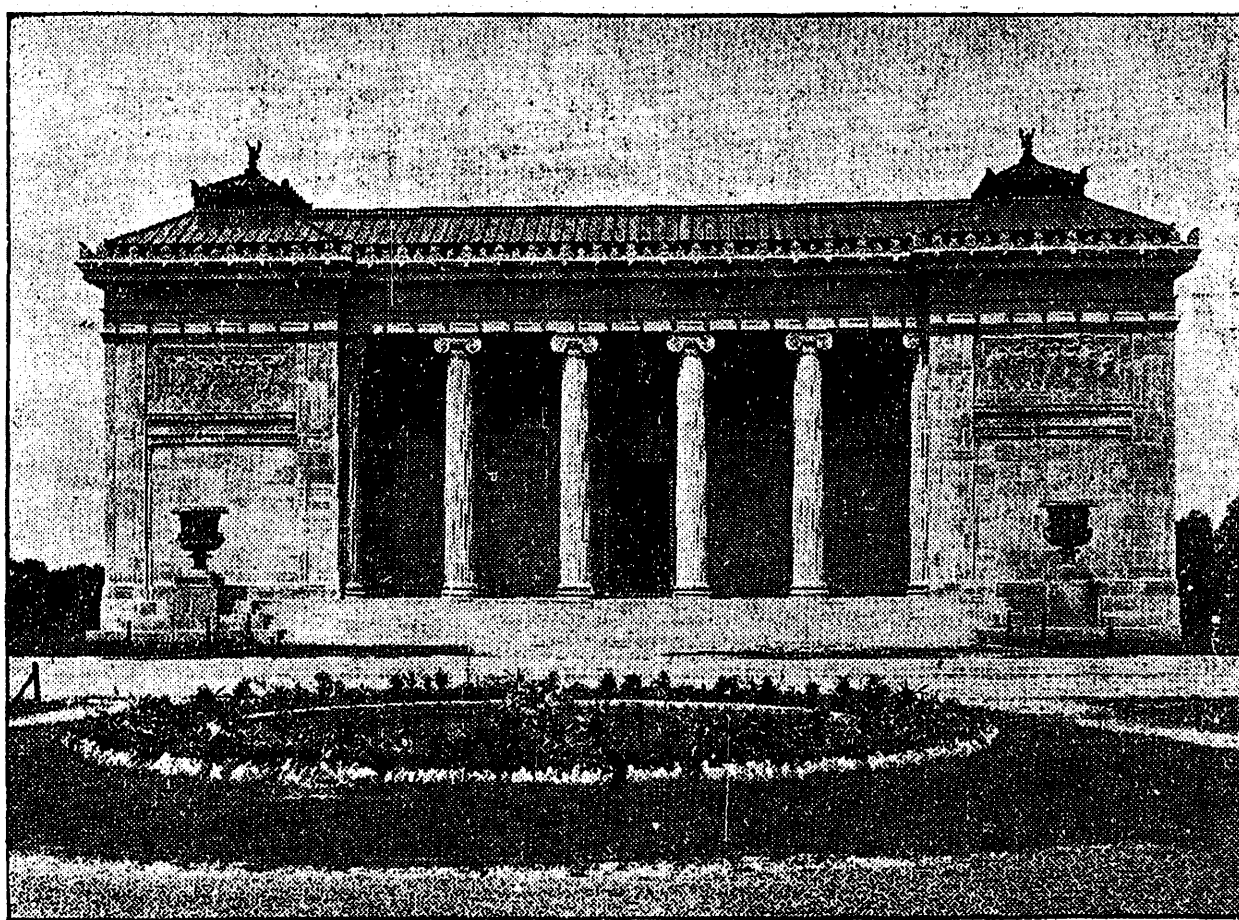


THE DELGADO MUSEUM AND THE PUBLIC

BY JAMES CARTER DEARD



THE DELGADO MUSEUM, SHOWING THE RECENTLY COMPLETED FOUNTAIN.

HERE is, of course, every possible variety of visitors among the great number that, in the aggregate, come to the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art in the City Park; some of these are interesting and interested in one way and some in another. And the opinions they express and the remarks they make, even those casually overheard, are at times instructive, at times amusing and at times both the one and the other.

Even before the museum collection was quite complete and the workmen were still busy putting the finishing touches on the first floor, now occupied by the statuary plaster reproductions, but then as yet an empty space, the "Venus of Milo" already stood in place at the head of the stairs leading to the gallery which opens into the exhibition rooms, with a placard inscribed "Hands off" hanging about her neck.

"Sure," remarked a newly-engaged workman looking at it, "and bedad they are. Bedad, for that matter, so are the two arms of her. But shwat in the name of sinse is the use of that cord strung up to be telling us so? Sure 'tis not blind we are."

"But perhaps, Pat," said his companion, an American workman, grinning mischievously, "other people may be blind—if you are not."

"True for you," asserted the Irishman, "and mobbe 'tis for them 'tis there. I did not think of that."

A Georgia "cracker," who by some strange chance had strayed into the museum, gave it as his opinion that the antique classic statue of the "Boy Extracting a Thorn," of which a fine reproduction was presented to the museum by Felix A. Dreyfus, was a "feller lookin' for hookworms."

An old lady from a rural district in one of the neighboring states who conscientiously studied the catalogue and referred to it for information at each and every picture in turn. On consulting her book for information concerning No. 46, she was much scandalized to find it headed "Flemish School, Card Players."

"Well," she said, "they may do that abroad, but I'm glad no card playing is allowed in our schools."

A young girl, one among a group of ladies and gentlemen, was evidently very much puzzled in looking at some of the so-called impressionistic pictures that at the opening of the museum decorated the walls.

"Dear me," she said at last, "I know what's the matter with them is; the paint, you see, is plastered on so thickly—looks as if a trowel had been used—that it hides the pictures. They should have been done in pastel."

The curator has his troubles—on one occasion one of the museum attendants hurriedly approaching, asked him to interview a gentleman upstairs who was "hot in the collar."

"What is the trouble?" asked Prof. Boyle.

"Why," replied the guard, "the man says that he saw Whistler's name up on the front of the building, but he can't find a picture by Whistler in the whole exhibition."

On another occasion a father accompanied his very pretty daughter and a collection of paintings made under the direction—so the curator phrased it—of a "misadirectress." The faces of both father and daughter beamed with prospective triumph of seeing the pictures they brought with them hanging in a great museum, but, alas! after the cruel jury pronounced its verdict, the downcast faces of the two visitors and the tearful eyes of the daughter proclaimed the bitter disappointment, as they departed, taking with them their rejected offerings.

But worse was to come, when the museum authorities, having been duly notified that a very valuable old painting that had been in the family "for fifty years," was to be sent to them as a loan, discovered upon its arrival that it was nothing more nor less than a cheap chromo.

A visitor of the Gradgrind species meeting an artist at the museum, said to him:

"What's the good of it all, any way? I understand these pictures here and the glimeracks downstairs cost a mint of money, but—as far as I can make out—they're no real good to anybody."

"Is that the way you look at it?" asked the artist.

"I can't look at it any different," he answered, "I'm like the wise owl."

"What owl was that?" inquired the artist.

"Didn't you never hear about the wise old owl and the mighty magpie?" asked the visitor. "You didn't! Then I'll up and tell you, seeing that, like a rabbit's tail, it's a short one, but first and last, it covers a good deal of ground any way. The mighty magpie, you must know, was a natural born collector and had scraped together a lot of odds and ends that—like collectors generally—he thought very highly of—little pieces of tin and tinsel, glass and brass, buckles and beads and buttons, remnants of ribbons, fragments of fringe, pieces of patchwork, and a bunch of things too numerous to mention—and he invited his friend, the wise owl, to come over and have a look at them."

"They're great," said the owl.

"Ever see anything like them?" asked the magpie.

"Never did," replied the owl.

"Unique, ain't they?" asked the mighty magpie.

"Uniquet I ever set eyes on," remarked the owl.

"I say, Uncle Owl, that's hearty," said the magpie. "They ought to be good. It has been the work of years to get them together. Now, will you, as a special favor, kindly give me, without compliment or reservations, your idea of the value of the whole collection?"

"The value?"

"Yes," said the magpie, "the value of the whole collection?"

"Without compliments or reservations?" asked the owl.

"Yes," said the mighty magpie.

"Well, ahem," remarked the owl, "that depends. What use can you make of them as materials with which to build your nest?"

"Not the slightest," replied the magpie cheerfully.

"But perhaps they do for food?" said the owl. "I've seen chickens eat gravel."

"Do you take me for a chicken—or an ostrich, maybe?" asked the magpie, getting mad.

"No," said the wise old owl, "I take you for a blamed fool. Your articles of virtu glitter all right, and are queer and unique to beat the band, but being of no positive, real, practical use to any creature living, they are not worth the two hind legs of a green grasshopper."

"And that's your idea of the actual value of an art collection?" the artist asked.

"I reckon it's one shared by a whole lot of sensible people, who aren't giving it away, you know. What do you think of it as an opinion?"

"I think it is an opinion worthy of an owl," replied the artist, turning on his heel and walking away.

"It's the misfortune," said the artist afterwards, in speaking of the matter, "of people who think of nothing higher than the houses they live in, that the very lowness and narrowness of their possibilities of enjoyment become such a source of pride and self-congratulation that they not only despise and condemn all pleasures lying outside the range of those to which they limit themselves, but entertain a hearty contempt for all and any who profess to differ with them."

One of the most interesting exhibits, in some respects, among many in the museum is the work of the school children. It may be said in this connection that the curator, Prof. Charles Wellington Boyle, advocates greater emphasis being placed on art education in the South, an emphasis being heralded by so important and creditable an institution as that of our Art Museum, constituting, as it undoubtedly does, a center to which all the most excellent of our contributors in painting, sculpture and decorative art must inevitably gravitate, and from which will as inevitably proceed the inspiration and ambition to execute works rivaling in excellence those on exhibition.

The ethical and educational value of such an art museum as that possessed by the Crescent City speaks for itself and is thought incapable of demonstration by figures. It can only be superficially gauged in two ways—in the number of visitors to the museum, and by the number of catalogues sold.

Judging by these, the Isaac Delgado Museum has even at the present time surpassed the highest and most hopeful expectations of those who have so generously given their time and attention and money to plan and build it.

The only methods now in use to foster a habit in the public of visiting the museum are the open door and the printed catalogue. These are both good, and first to come in the development of the proper helpful relations of the museum with the public, but there may be other steps of equal importance to be taken.

Chief among these is the education of the public in what the museum collects and exhibits, and as has been said on another occasion "the surest and quickest way to increase intelligent interest is through the school."

The movement in England which began as long ago as 1853 to educate artisans—especially those in which work artistic knowledge and ability are required—and try to interest them in their crafts and make them take more pride in the work of their hands, had one fatal defect. It began with adults. Lectures, evening classes, museum collections were freely supplied. High hopes were entertained of their influence on the products of English artisan industry. These hopes have been in great measure disappointed, for those who had steady employment already at living wages lacked incentive to try to do better work.

Our art museum, however, has only to ally itself with the schools, slowly perhaps, carefully and surely to find countless recipients of its beauty who would inevitably become its fast friends and supporters in the future—not only the teachers, who must conduct the visiting classes and intelligently explain, to give formal lectures, on the exhibits, but the pupils themselves, who would in this way identify themselves with the institution and learn to take a pride and a vital interest in its continuance and future prosperity.

"It is significant," says T. Lindsey Blaney, president of the American Federation of Arts, "that the history of art is elected in German universities by so many students of law, theology and medicine as a broadening and cultural course. The subject is invading even the German technical schools along with the languages, ethics and history."

Among us, where the study of art has not until recent years been taken seriously, the fault lay largely with the female schools of former days, where a little dabbling in oil and colors and more or less painful thrumming on a piano was dignified with the name of art. In this matter, a great change has already taken place and with proper persistence, especially with the aid of the capable teachers who are now making it their life work, and the assistance of the organized effort of the art association of New Orleans, thoroughness in art training may come to be a distinguishing characteristic of our local workers.

Professor Charles Wellington Boyle, the present curator, was born in this city. His father, J. P. A. Boyle, was a prominent produce broker and his mother, whose maiden name was Celeste McCandlish, a niece of Chief Justice Taney, was from Norfolk, Va. When at school Professor Boyle's proclivity for drawing pictures on the slates of his schoolmates was continually getting him into trouble with his teachers. Finally his father engaged Robert B. Montague, a civil engineer who professed to teach drawing and water color painting, to give his son a course of lessons. The civil engineer's methods depended too much on mechanical aids and formulas to suit his pupil, who preferred free hand drawing—the freer the better. He then took lessons of Mollinary, the well-known veteran artist, and remained working in his studio for some eight months. He also went to the studio of Polney. Later he studied under Robert Henri in New York, making rapid and substantial progress. He afterwards taught in Palmetto Institute, Professor Ferrel's School for Boys, Art School of Artist Association, and for the last few years has been connected with the Home Institute of Sophie Wright.

Prof. Boyle has always been a serious, steady and persistent student. About the time of the death of W. H. Buck, the well-known New Orleans artist, his work came prominently before the public.

At an exhibition of paintings given in the old building called Mechanics' Institute, visited by George Junis, then on a visit to New Orleans, there was among other paintings a landscape by Prof. Boyle, before which he paused, pronouncing it "as good a picture as he had ever seen," and confidently predicting the future success of the young artist.

Among the specimens of art work in metal now in the Delgado Museum is a collection that may well be called unique. It is loaned by Dr. I. M. Cline. Just after the Boxer insurrection in China a chest was sent to New Orleans to be claimed and called for there. Weeks and months passed and no claimant appeared. At last the box and its contents were put up for sale to cover charges for storage, and its contents almost in their entirety fell into the hands of Dr. I. M. Cline. It was a fortunate find, for upon examination it was discovered to consist of Chinese bronze vases, evidently of great an-

tiquity, probably looted from some special collection in China, where such objects are highly valued. Who sent them or why they were sent here will, in all probability, never be known.

Prof. Fewkashima, a noted Japanese archæologist, who saw them in 1910 when en route to an international exhibition, stopped over in New Orleans and examined this collection of bronzes with considerable care. He said that the collection contained rare specimens, the equal some of which he had never seen, nor had he met with any like them in all his researches. He also said that there were among them specimens that were without doubt more than three thousand years old, which was proved by the fact that the inscriptions upon them were of an archaic type of Chinese characters called "grass text" characters, which antedate those now used by the Chinese. He also said that their genuineness was proved to his satisfaction by the character of the metal used, the workmanship and their patina.

He was deeply interested in these vases, so much so indeed that he proposed to revisit New Orleans in 1912, and as far as he could, give the owner a history of each and every vase, to

the extent that such special information on the subject as he possessed would allow him. On his return, however, in 1911, he was attacked with appendicitis in Virginia and had to undergo an operation that proved fatal, and the lips of the best-qualified authority on Chinese and Japanese antiquities were silenced before they had given the promised history of those rare pieces of Chinese metal work.

In the museum there are miniatures and ceramics and carvings in ivory and reproductions of famous statuary that are worth much more interest and study than can be given by a passing glance or a single visit to the museum. There is a grandfather's clock of about the time of William and Mary, that ought to have a history worth knowing, if one had the means of working it out. Indeed it would without doubt add enormously to the interest of a very large number of articles on exhibition if there were cards or catalogues giving far more detailed information concerning them than is now available to the visitor. The appointments of the exquisite little building are, however, from top to bottom, including the office of the curator, with its solid rosewood furniture, as perfect as may be.