



Primary Source Workshop

**Developing
Primary Source
Analytical Skills
Using MoMA and
Abby Aldrich
Rockefeller
Documents**

LEVEL: 10TH GRADE–UNDERGRADUATE

CREATED BY

Marissa Vassari | MA, MLIS
Education Program Manager
Rockefeller Archive Center

Danielle N. Gilman | PhD
Assistant Professor in Residence
University of Connecticut

CONTENTS

3	About This Workshop
4	Document Guide
6	Primary Sources
35	Workshop Procedure
40	About Us

ABOUT THIS WORKSHOP

Collaborating with the RAC provided my students with an invaluable opportunity to engage directly with primary source materials. The workshop design not only introduced students to the practices of document analysis and archival research but also encouraged them to see themselves as active participants in the work of history-making and storytelling.

Our partnership deepened my students' understanding of the complexities of archival research while also strengthening their critical reading and writing skills for work in future disciplinary contexts.

Danielle Gilman

Assistant Professor, Department of English
University of Connecticut

This primary source workshop engages students with archival material related to [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller](#) (AAR) and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which she cofounded in 1929.

The students will be introduced to and develop their understanding and analysis of primary sources and archival research skills through the lens of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, one of the founders of the museum, and the early days of MoMA.

The workshop uses a curated set of documents to help develop primary source literacy and research skills. The “KWHL” graphic organizer helps frame the documents.

K – What I **K**now
W – What I **W**ant to know more about
H – **H**ow will answers to my questions
L – What I **L**earned from the documents

The [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller papers](#) and other documents related to MoMA that were selected for this workshop are housed at the [Rockefeller Archive Center](#). They serve as the entry point into learning how to read, analyze, and cite primary sources within this workshop’s KWHL framework.

This multisession scaffolded workshop reinforces the value of primary source literacy, archival research, and ownership of the research process.

The following topics relate to this workshop:

- Women in philanthropy
- Engaging in the nonprofit sector
- Art history institutions

This workshop was created for the Georgia Institute of Technology’s English 1101 Archival Narratives course and University of Connecticut’s First-Year Writing Program.

Many thanks to RAC staff members Michele Beckerman, Amy Fitch, and Jenna Fleming for sharing their expertise.

DOCUMENT GUIDE

1

Letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Nelson A. Rockefeller

September 14, 1933

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records

Rockefeller Archive Center

2

Letter from David H. Stevens to Nelson A. Rockefeller

January 17, 1934

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records

Rockefeller Archive Center

3

Letter from Nelson A. Rockefeller to H.E. Winlock

January 10, 1934

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records

Rockefeller Archive Center

4

Report of Publicity for the Museum of Modern Art

1932

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records

Rockefeller Archive Center

5

Present Status and Future Direction of the Museum of Modern Art

1932

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records

Rockefeller Archive Center

DOCUMENT GUIDE

6

Letter from A. Conger Goodyear to Nelson A. Rockefeller

October 27, 1931

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records
Rockefeller Archive Center

7

Letter from Nelson A. Rockefeller to Walter H. Lippincott

May 17, 1932

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records
Rockefeller Archive Center

8

Letter from Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to Nelson A. Rockefeller

December 1, 1931

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records
Rockefeller Archive Center

9

“Rebirth of a Museum,” *The New York Times*

October 8, 1958

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records
Rockefeller Archive Center

10

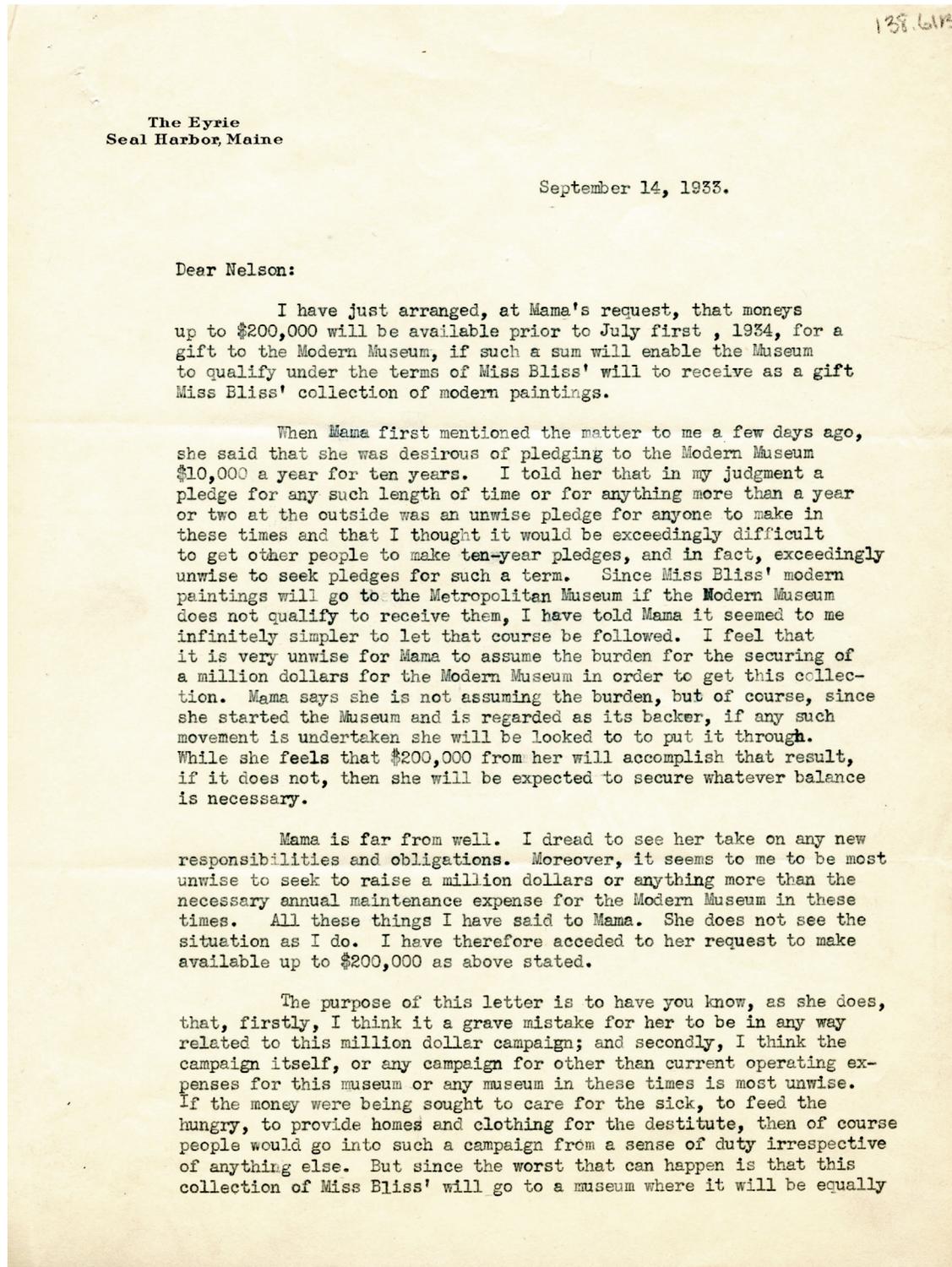
“Televised Art Instruction Series Draws an Audience of All Ages,”

The New York Times, July 25, 1952

Series E | Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records
Rockefeller Archive Center

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 1



Letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
to Nelson A. Rockefeller
September 14, 1933

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 1 continued

138.618

2.

available to the public, I can see no justification from a public point of view in seeking to raise a million dollars at this time to insure the collection going to the Modern Museum.

This letter I am writing simply for your information and to record my earnest convictions in the matter. I have said to Mama everything that I have said in the letter. Therefore, while there is no reason why she should not know that I have written you as I have talked to her, I see nothing to be gained by her being so informed. This letter requires no answer.

Affectionately,

Father.

Mr. Nelson A. Rockefeller,
26 Broadway,
New York, N.Y.

P.S.- Since dictating the above yesterday, I have told Mama that I had written you. She in turn has told me that on reflection she feels she can provide the \$200,000 herself and that therefore she will not need the pledge which I have already written and given her. I have told her that the pledge would stand, that I would not want to cancel it and that it would be good until availed of or until it expired on the expiration date, July first, 1934.

Mama was deeply touched by your telephoning her this morning as you did and telling her that you and the others in New York would handle the whole matter and that she could dismiss it completely from her mind. In Mama's present condition any problems, even insignificant ones, cause her anxiety and retard her improvement. We must all study in every way to keep her as free as possible from problems of every kind.

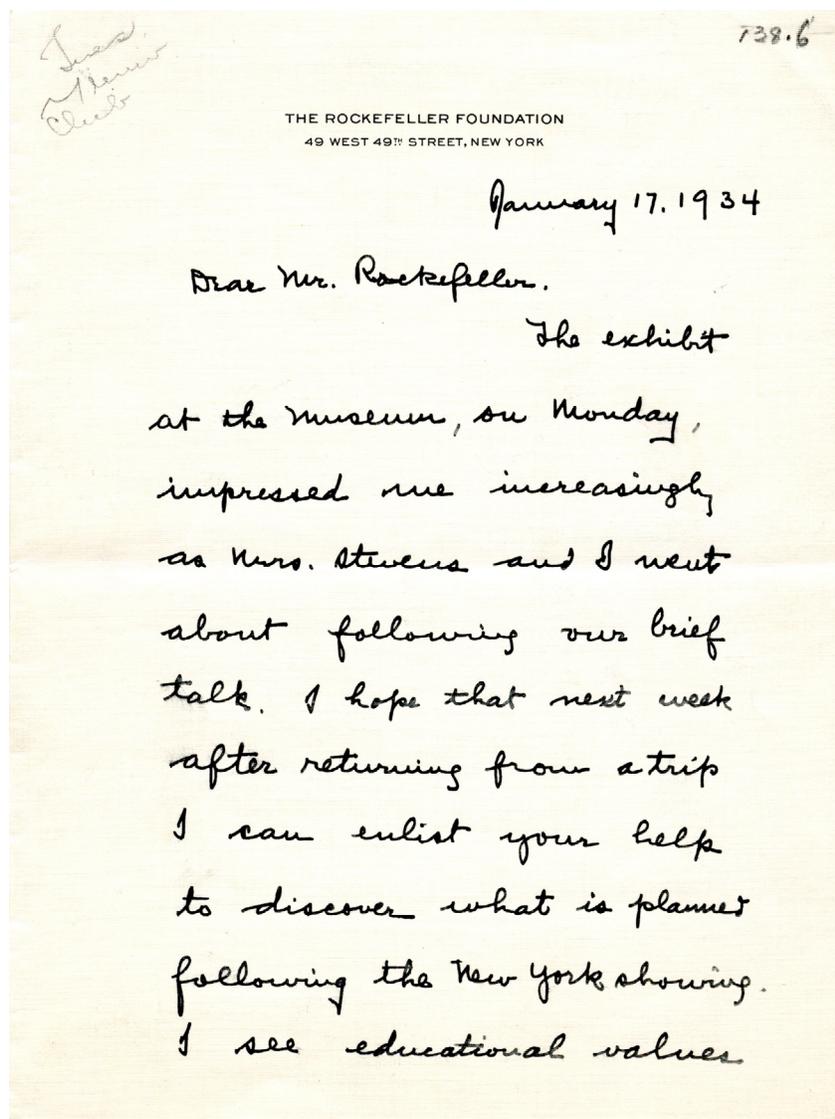
Letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
to Nelson A. Rockefeller
September 14, 1933

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 2



Transcription

THE ROCKEFELLER
FOUNDATION
49 West 49th Street,
New York

January 17, 1934

Dear Mr. Rockefeller,

The exhibit at the museum on Monday, impressed me increasingly as Mrs. Stevens and I went about following our brief talk. I hope that next week after returning from a trip I can enlist your help to discover that is planned following the New York showing. I see educational values...

Letter from David H. Stevens
to Nelson A. Rockefeller
January 17, 1934

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1934-1941](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 2 continued

in having such a collection
exhibited at universities and
colleges, particularly because
I'm exploring ways to start
a small foundation program
in drama.

Don't trouble to acknowledge,
please. I'll simply call your
secretary next Monday to learn
where I can get the facts.

Yours cordially,
David H. Stevens

Mr. Nelson A. Rockefeller
The Building

Transcription

in having such a collection
exhibited at universities
and colleges, particularly
because I'm exploring ways
to start a small foundation
program in drama.

Don't trouble to
acknowledge, please.
I'll simply call your
secretary next Monday
to learn where
I can get the facts.

Yours cordially,
David H. Stevens

Mr. Nelson A. Rockefeller
The Building

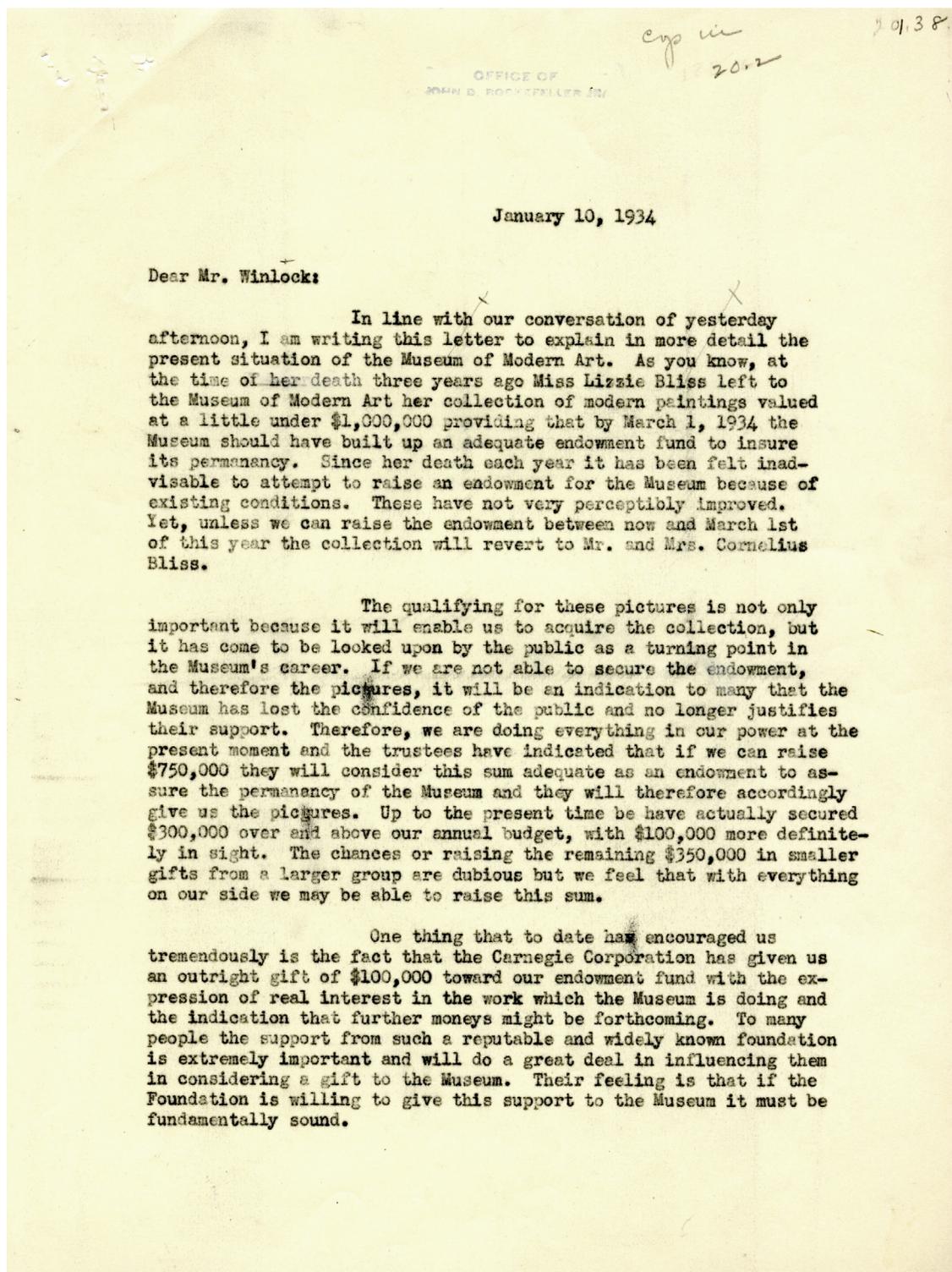
Letter from David H. Stevens
to Nelson A. Rockefeller
January 17, 1934

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1934-1941](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests -
Series E; Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 3



Letter from Nelson A. Rockefeller
to H.E. Winlock
January 10, 1934

Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1934-1941

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 3 continued

-2-

There is one other thing which would help almost as much as this gift from the Carnegie Foundation and that is some expression from the head of the Metropolitan Museum. At the present time a great many people think that bad feeling and misunderstanding exists between the two museums and that sooner or later the modern museum will be frozen out by the Metropolitan and therefore that there is no point in their making a contribution to an organization which does not have a recognized position in the field. There is, naturally, nothing in this. However, when you try to explain it to them they always ask whether there is any definite understanding between the two museums and particularly whether the Metropolitan has ever expressed in writing an interest in or a desire to cooperate with the Museum of Modern Art. To date we have to say that it has not and it is on account of this that I am writing you this letter. It would be tremendously helpful in our campaign, especially with the more important contributors, if we could have such a letter covering the following points:

That the Metropolitan Museum feels it would be a tremendous misfortune to the art world if the Museum of Modern Art were forced to give up its present activities.

That the Metropolitan Museum hopes very much it will be able to raise the moneys necessary in order that it may qualify, under Miss Bliss' will, to receive her collection.

That the Museum of Modern Art supplements in the field of modern art the activities of the Metropolitan and that the Metropolitan feels that a closer cooperation in the future will be to the mutual advantage of both institutions.

That the Metropolitan Museum would be glad to entertain suggestions from the Museum of Modern Art concerning a possible cooperation between the two institutions regarding the ultimate display of pictures purchased through the Hearn fund.

That as already the two museums have three mutual trustees and as a strong feeling of friendship exists between the two museums a closer cooperation should be easily arrived at.

Confidentially, Mr. Goodyear is seeing Mr. Felix Warburg on Friday of this week. We feel that a letter of this kind would be particularly important in helping Mr. Warburg come to some conclusion concerning the gift which he is contemplating making. Therefore, although I hesitate to suggest it, if it would be possible to obtain a letter, even perhaps a temporary one from you saying that Mr. Blumenthal was going to write covering the above mentioned points, it would be extremely helpful and greatly appreciated by us. I hate to add this one more problem to the many which you must be facing at the present time but the situation is most urgent as far as we are concerned.

With sincere appreciation for your interest.

Sincerely,

Mr. H.E. Winlock,
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York City.

NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER

Letter from Nelson A. Rockefeller
to H.E. Winlock
January 10, 1934

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1934-1941](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 4

REPORT OF PUBLICITY FOR THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
BY THE PHOENIX NEWS PUBLICITY BUREAU

The Phoenix Bureau takes pleasure in submitting the following report upon the conclusion of its contract with The Museum of Modern Art for the period of one year, November 12, 1931, to November 12, 1932.

As a result of the service 1,694 clippings have been assembled in six clipping books from 626 newspapers. In addition, stories have been published in 68 magazines.

The largest reading circulation was reached in October, 1932, with 11,779,319.

Naturally, the reading circulation of the Museum's publicity varied with the Museum's activities. During the two weeks of November, 1931, and the month of December, 1931, the reading circulation was 12,682,171.

The reading circulation by month follows:

January	-	10,555,944
February	-	9,602,170
March	-	9,624,332
April	-	4,579,909
May	-	11,139,789
June	-	10,018,742
July	-	6,074,758
August	-	2,202,745
September	-	5,077,585
October	-	11,779,310
November	-	4,828,683 (two weeks)

Through stories placed over syndicates and in magazines, clippings on the November, 1932, service will continue to arrive for six weeks.

The Bureau has made every effort to aid The Museum of Modern Art in obtaining recognition as a national institution. With that end in view it has distributed material nationally, and the clipping books and charts show circulation in forty-seven states.

It has endeavored to secure wider attention for the exhibitions by placing material in news, educational, feature, and rotogravure sections, as well as on the art pages where the material would naturally be welcomed.

Report of Publicity for the
Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 4 continued

A nation-wide radio broadcast over Station WJZ was arranged by the Bureau in connection with the opening of the new building. Whenever possible a news interpretation was placed upon the material and the result was an awakened interest on the part of the press in general.

The following exhibitions were thoroughly publicized - Diego Rivera, Exhibition of Modern Architecture, Murals by American Painters and Photographers, Summer Exhibition, Color Reproductions, Persian Frescoes, and Exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture.

The publicity campaign has had a two-fold purpose:

1. To increase attendance at the exhibitions, thus tending toward an increase in the sale of catalogues;
2. To lay a foundation of interest which will be of value to the Membership Committee in its membership campaign.

We believe that these purposes have been fulfilled and that public interest in the Museum is steadily growing.

Respectfully submitted,
PHOENIX NEWS PUBLICITY BUREAU, INC.
(signed) Pauline E. Mandigo.
Vice President.

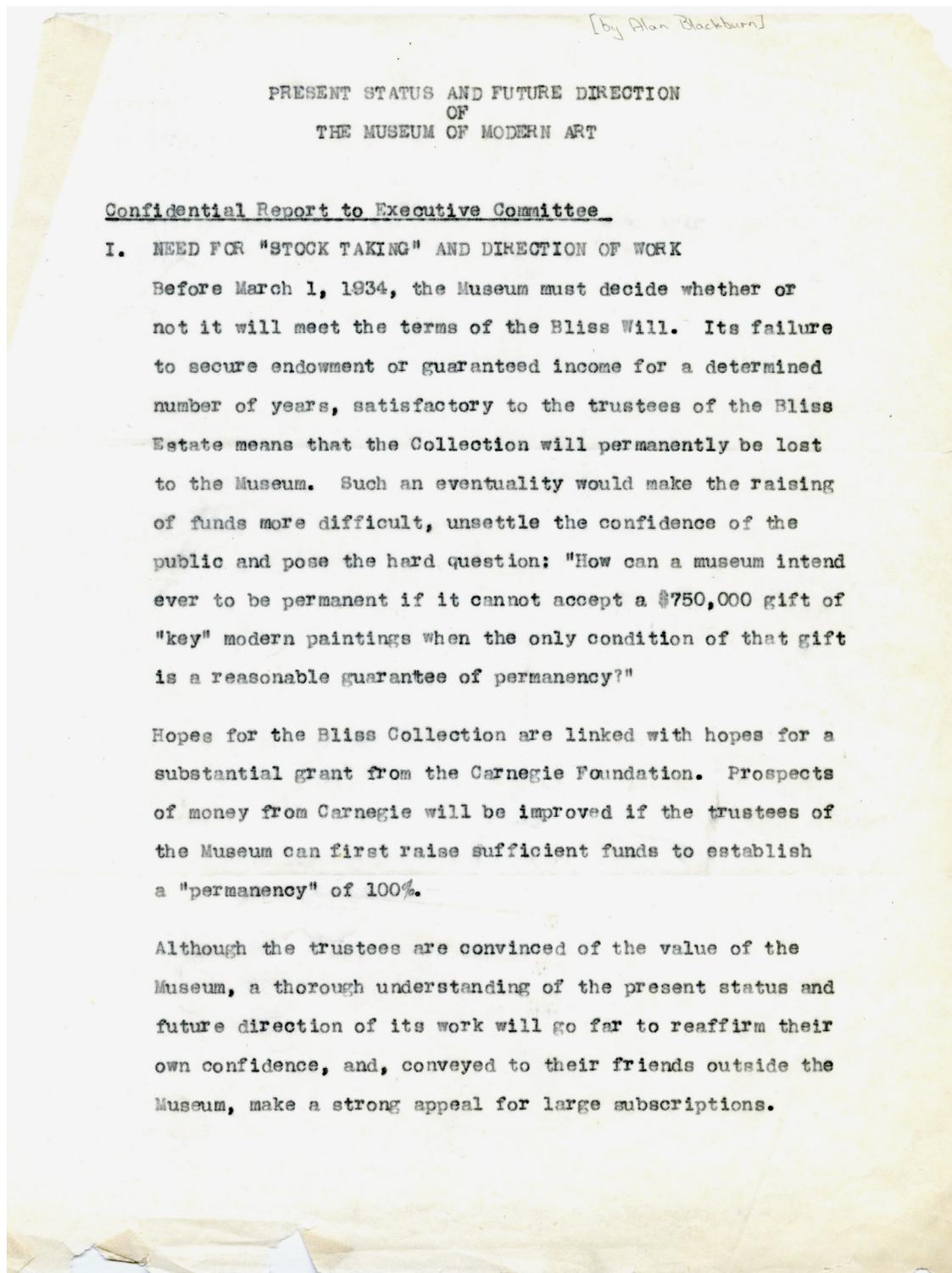
Report of Publicity for the
Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5



Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-2-

Moreover, the Museum has entered its fifth experimental year with an organization so indefinite that a defined course must be charted to avoid confusion and a downright inability to make the best of magnificent opportunities.

II. DOUBLE NATURE OF THE MUSEUM

Analysis of the present organization of the Museum reveals two distinct types of work. The conscious acknowledgement by the trustees of this two-fold character will go far to make decisions of policy easier and consistent.

1. "Production."

Basically, the Museum "produces" art knowledge, criticism, scholarship, understanding, taste. This is its laboratory or study work. It is the Director's chief concern. This preparation or "production" work is the "stuff" of which the Museum's prestige is made.

2. "Distribution."

Once the product is made, the next job is its distribution. An exhibition in the galleries is distribution. Circulation of exhibitions, catalogs, memberships, publicity, radio, are all distribution.

This main division of the Museum's work is not merely theoretical; it is thoroughly practical. There can very easily be distribution without sufficient preparation. (Witness some of the work of the College Art Association, and the large number of minor exhibitions which the Museum itself has held.) There can also be thorough preparation without sufficient distribution, as in some of the Museum's major exhibitions, which were displayed for only five weeks, and were discontinued when the

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-3-

attendance was at the highest point.

A proper balance between production and distribution can be obtained in the Museum only by emphasis on the former. More time and planning and money must be given to production. It cannot be carried on in the atmosphere of a newspaper office.

Consider the Museum entirely as a business. If the product is good, its duplication and distribution can be endless. There is no need of "burning up" the product on hand by an extravagant policy of too rapid and thin distribution and without a studied replacement that should exceed in rate the distribution. This proposition is especially pertinent to a museum of modern art that works in a limited field.

Too often American institutions, and the Museum of Modern Art is no exception, confuse production with distribution or vice versa. The result is a disorganized front to the public. For example, an exhibition should not be considered first for its "popular" appeal. It should first be judged on its intrinsic merits. Whether or not it can be satisfactorily distributed is a separate matter.

The distribution of the Museum's product will improve once it is looked at apart from its preparation. Just as it is unfair to judge preparation from a "popular" angle, so it is unfair to make distribution a purely scholarly affair. It should be impossible to corrupt a good product by intelligent distribution.

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-4-

This section most certainly does not intend to convey the idea that the left hand should not know what the right is doing. It is a plea to realize that there are two hands. Once that has been done it is not difficult to work them together in the mutual advancement of the Museum.

III. THE MUSEUM'S AUDIENCE

Too often the Museum loses track of its public. It is apt to think of it as a nebulous mass of people with a common instinct to praise or condemn. Arguments about the value of high museum attendance are pointless without analysis of that attendance.

1. The "400"

There is a small but powerful minority of professionals and amateurs, critics, collectors, scholars, dealers, who know about modern art and have a passionate interest in it. It is this group which determines to a great extent whether or not the Museum is "up to standard." Their favorable opinion gives prestige. This group influences to a great extent the opinions of the next group.

2. The Social Group

This term includes the majority of the members of the Museum and their friends, people who are interested in modern art, are socially inclined, and, in general, earn over \$5,000 a year. The group hovers between trying to understand modern art and accepting it as fashionable.

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-5-

From the standpoint of money and interest it is the most important group. In the giving of both it is fickle.

3. The Action Group

This group is composed of business people who want to "do something" about what they see. They are the people who build gasoline stations in the international style, use color reproductions of modern paintings in movie sets or have murals painted in office buildings. Really to win them over would change the aspect of the entire nation. They have not accepted the proposition that good art is good business but are not absolutely opposed to the idea. They are seldom visitors to the galleries but are reached by publicity or word of mouth.

4. The Students

In universities, colleges, art schools, preparatory schools, high schools, finishing schools, is a specialized audience seeking instruction. Their attendance is often organized by their teachers.

5. The Public

The public, the largest group is made up of what is left over. They are less mercurial than any of the other groups and are chiefly inspired by a desire to "know what it is all about" - part curiosity, part a vague desire for "culture." They compose about 75% of "attendance." Their eventual acceptance of modern art is a victory for the "400", a re-

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-6-

assurance to the social group, and a condition of action by the action group. The problem of the "New Leisure" concerns this group especially.

6. The Trustees

The Museum will do well to consider its trustees as an audience apart from their official functions. Not to inform the trustees, who are persons busy with many activities outside the Museum, would be a fatal omission. To win their absolute confidence and cultivate in them a true understanding of the institution is the spark of the Museum's life. Obvious as the need of this work may be, it should not be forgotten that an institution like the Museum can very easily "get ahead" of its trustees and fail to keep them abreast of its affairs. The Museum is the kind of organization, that, quite apart from their financial support, depends on its trustees to keep it alive and modern. The Advisory Committee as an audience is related to the Trustees, as is also the Membership Committee; they too must be kept informed.

IV. "EXPANSION" and "PROGRAM"

The Museum's growth has been a steady pressure from within caused by an insistent public demand. The circulating exhibitions and the publications departments were formed only when the work proved too great for the existing staff. Every move into a new

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-7-

field is a logical step from existing activities. It is by no means unrelated to the rest of the institution.

The Museum has already committed itself, in its official statements, to an enlargement of its activities. The charter allows the broadest scope: "established and maintained for the purpose of encouraging and developing the study of modern art and the application of such art to manufacture and practical life, and furnishing popular instruction."

The only official department of the Museum is the Architectural department. There are a number of units of work in the Museum which should properly be considered departments and so developed:

I. Production

1. Department of Painting, Sculpture, Graphic Arts and Photography - with its publications.
2. Department of Architecture, and Commercial and Industrial Arts. (Exterior and Interior architecture, furniture, utensils, advertising, typography, design in light and heavy industry.) - with its publications.

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-8-

3. Department of Moving Pictures - with its publications.
4. Library, slides, and photographs.

II. Distribution

1. Circulating Exhibits
2. Membership
3. Publications
4. Publicity
5. Registry
6. Radio and Docent Talks
7. Extension - (Lectures, students, organizations)

What the Museum has done to date in these departments with its present budget allowance and limited staff points the way to their more complete development at a reasonably low expense.

It is to the distribution departments that the "product" of the Museum is handed over. Of the distribution departments, the Radio has the most "popular" audience; the Library mostly the "400". The Publications Department would distribute both catalogs, monographs, etc. - and more popular educational material. Concern of these departments about "original material" is eliminated by acceptance of the dual-work plan. Their coordination is simplified. These departments are the contact with the various types of audience. The contact is both public service and educational work, and agrees with the spirit of the charter: "application of such art to manufacture and practical life." The latter can be elaborated into a broad educational program which

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-9-

should appeal to the Foundations such as the Carnegie and the Rockefeller, and to large individual subscribers such as Mr. Harkness.

IV. THE FIELD

The Museum should limit the field of its work more exactly; especially because of the fact that the charter is so unlimited. This can be done from two angles:

1. Relation in Time

Usually the period which the Museum covers is considered to be from about 1860 to the present day. Excursions back of 1870 invite criticism on the ground that the Museum is out of its field. The Museum has answered these criticisms by relating such exhibitions to the present as in the case of "American Sources of Modern Art." This policy is not satisfactory because the modern section of the exhibition may become a mere feeble, specious excuse. Always to require such an excuse for each exhibition of this kind hampers the Museum unnecessarily.

The Director believes the Museum should frankly state its right to appraise, by exhibition, any art of any age from a modern point of view. In the Director's report on "Loan Exhibitions" this proposition is more fully developed.

Its acceptance would at once clarify the situation, eliminate far fetched and damaging analogies, and increase the possible number of exhibitions. By a continued publicity of this policy, the public can be educated to its acceptance on the

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-10-

ground that it is reasonable and useful in elucidating the art of the last 50 years.

2. Relation to Other Institutions

Whenever this policy encroaches on the field of other institutions there are two deciding factors:

- a. Does the other institution plan such an exhibition or have the equipment to carry through the plan?
- b. Is the other institution doing a good job with the particular material?

The latter point is pertinent especially to fields other than painting, sculpture, and architecture apart from the time element. For example, industrial art is not now being adequately or satisfactorily handled. Experiments are being conducted with motion picture presentation, but they are neither centralized, integrated, nor interpreted sufficiently to the public by a body of studied criticism. There is overlapping in the field of circulating exhibitions. Just as a more detailed report on educational activities can be prepared, so also a report can be made, principally with the Carnegie Corporation in mind, to show how the Museum can effect an economy of effort and money by centralizing units of scattered work. Such economy should be of interest to Carnegie. The presentation of modern art is strengthened by centralization and interrelation.

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-11-

CHANGING EXHIBITIONS AND THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

In the light of the preceding statements, a relation of the changing exhibitions to the Permanent Collection is proposed.

The Permanent Collection is definitely a "production" function of the Museum. The changing exhibitions are in their presented form "distribution." The pace of the former is steady and slow; of the latter more varied and rapid. One points to accomplishments of a permanent nature; the other experiments and discovers. The Permanent Collection may be pictured as a torpedo in motion:

1800 1825 1850 1875 1900 1925 1950



The blunt end pushes into the advanced field of art by means of the changing exhibitions. The bulk is made up of "accepted" modern art. The tail tapers off into art which has become "classical" and is ready for the general museum. The torpedo moves forward by acquiring and retains its length of 70 years by giving to other museums. A strong and well proportioned permanent collection gives body to the Museum and supplies a splendid background for any changing exhibitions. The Director's report deals with the Permanent Collection in more detail.

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-12-

Ideas for exhibitions will not be exhausted. With a well defined field of operation, a background of the Permanent Collection, and a planned economy of exhibitions, the number cannot be exhausted in a given period of ten years. The Director's report considers a ten-year program of exhibitions subject to yearly adjustment. One feature of this is the five-year repeating exhibition.

The exhibitions can more consciously be presented in relation to the various audiences. Some of the minor exhibitions can frankly be designed for the "400." Certain types of major exhibitions and minor ones can be explanatory or informative. These are "primer" exhibitions that aim to instruct and inform the public by the nature of their presentation. Other exhibitions could be planned for the business group. By preparing exhibitions for various types of audience and publicizing this policy, the Museum can avoid the usual charge by the "400" that the exhibition is "popular" and by the public that it is too snobbish. Hence the changing exhibition policy of the Museum would be one of deciding the balance between the regular or scholarly exhibition and the explanatory or informative exhibition.

VI. RELATIONS WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Consideration of the Museum's field immediately suggests

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-13-

definite relationships with other institutions. The Museum must inform itself more fully of the activities and policy of organizations that either are in its field or border on it.

A policy should be worked out with the Metropolitan Museum on two counts:

1. Range of activity, especially in loan exhibitions
2. Permanent Collections

A liaison committee composed of Trustees from both institutions might be appointed to handle these matters. A gift to the Metropolitan Museum from our permanent (or Bliss) collection could initiate the new policy.

The whole field of relations with foundations in general should be closely examined.

How clearly this whole set-up would define the publicity program is obvious.

VII. IMMEDIATE STEPS

To interpret in action the ideas embodied in the above sections there should be initiated and completed, or continued, in the year 1933-34, the following steps:

Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5 continued

-14-

1. To approve by vote of the trustees the principles of report and the Director's accompanying reports.
2. To underwrite in a form acceptable to the Bliss Estate a "permanent" fund for the Museum. This work should be complete by the end of October. One trustee might accept the responsibility of seeing that this is done.
3. Confer with the Carnegie Corporation in regard to future grants.
4. Begin conversations with the Metropolitan in regard to policy.
5. Coordinate the publicity program with the policy.
6. Begin a broad membership drive in October.
7. Determine the budget for 1933-34.

* * *

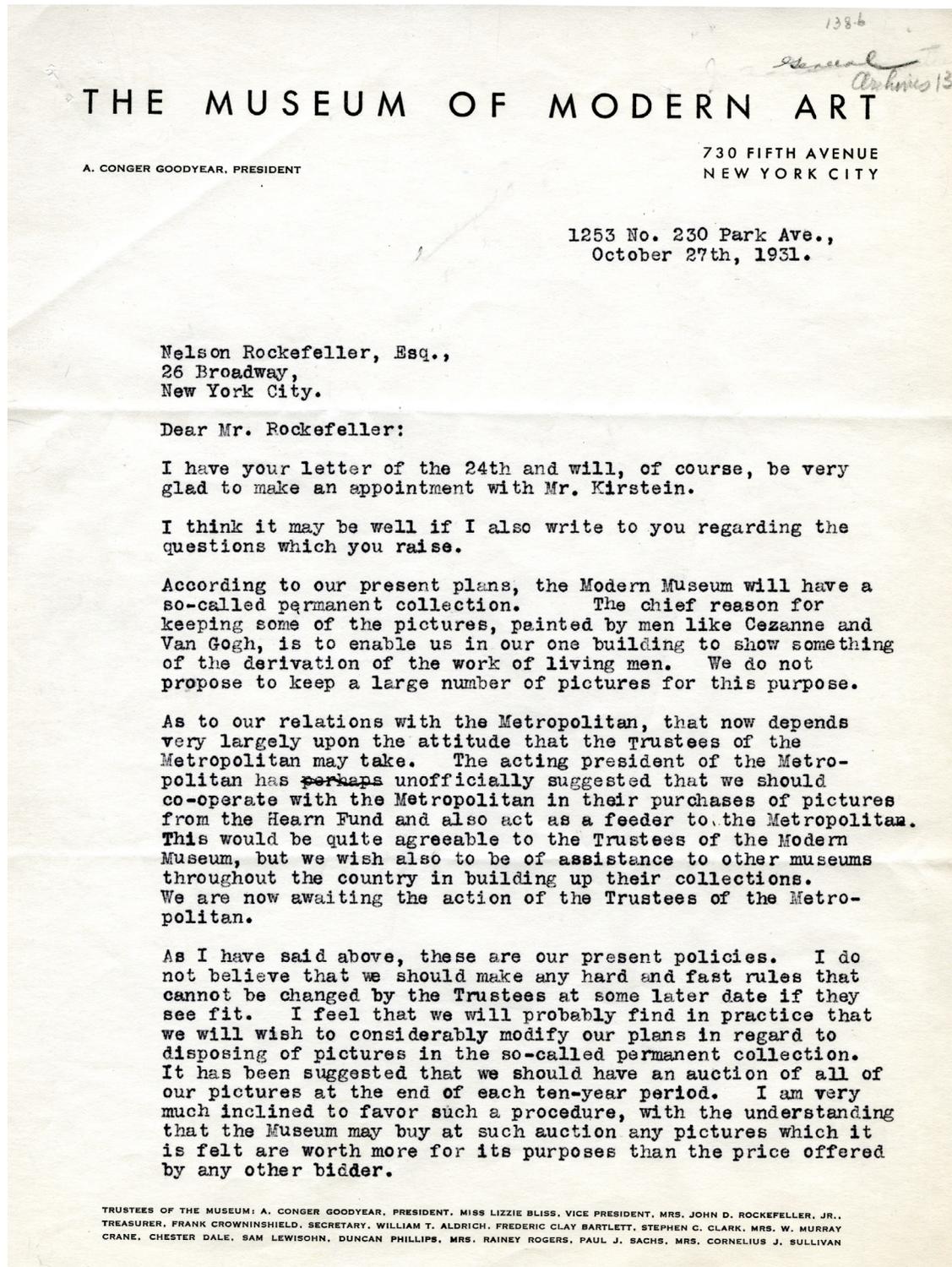
Present Status and Future Direction
of the Museum of Modern Art
1932

[Museum of Modern Art - Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Contributions - September 1933 Pledge, 1933-1934](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 6



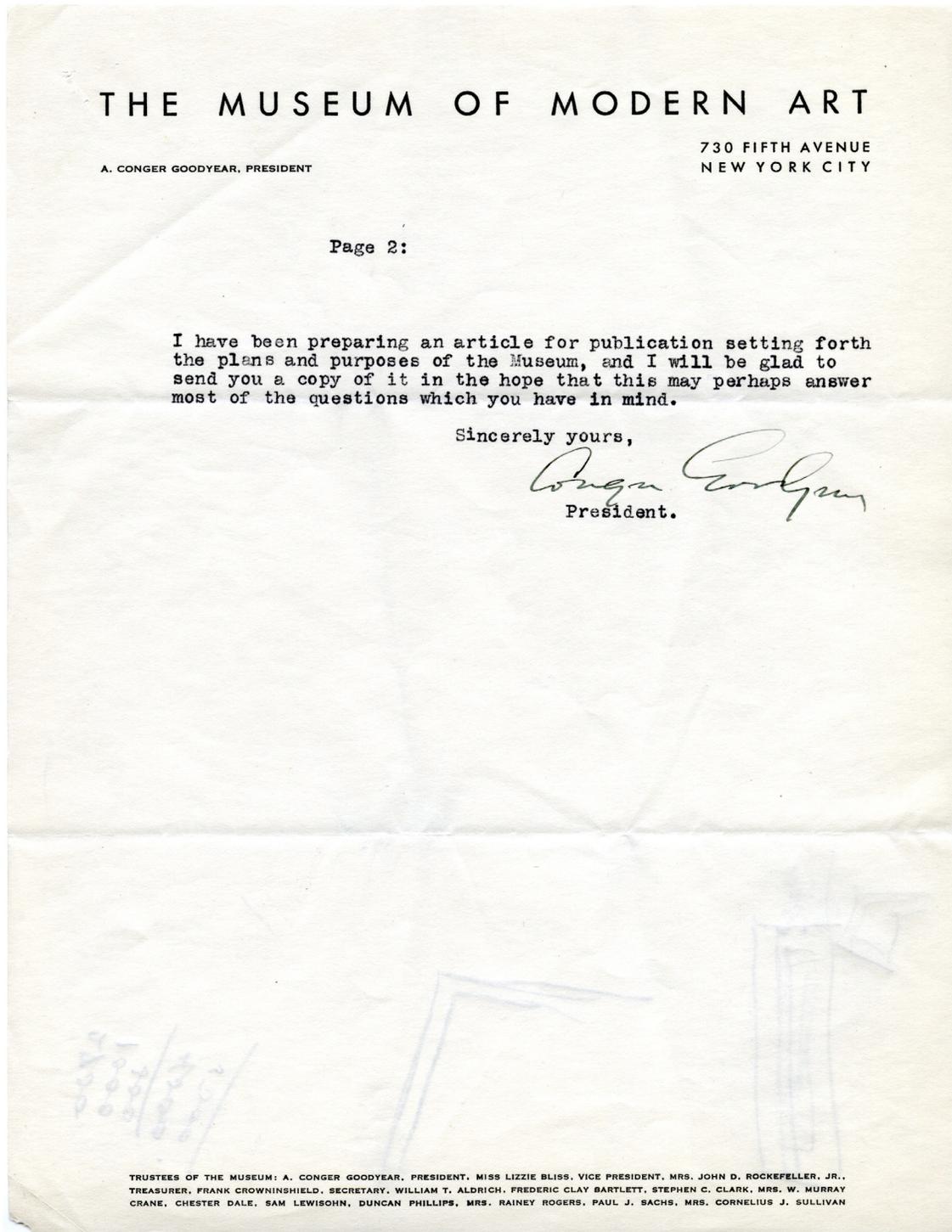
Letter from A. Conger Goodyear
to Nelson A. Rockefeller
October 27, 1931

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1933](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 6 continued



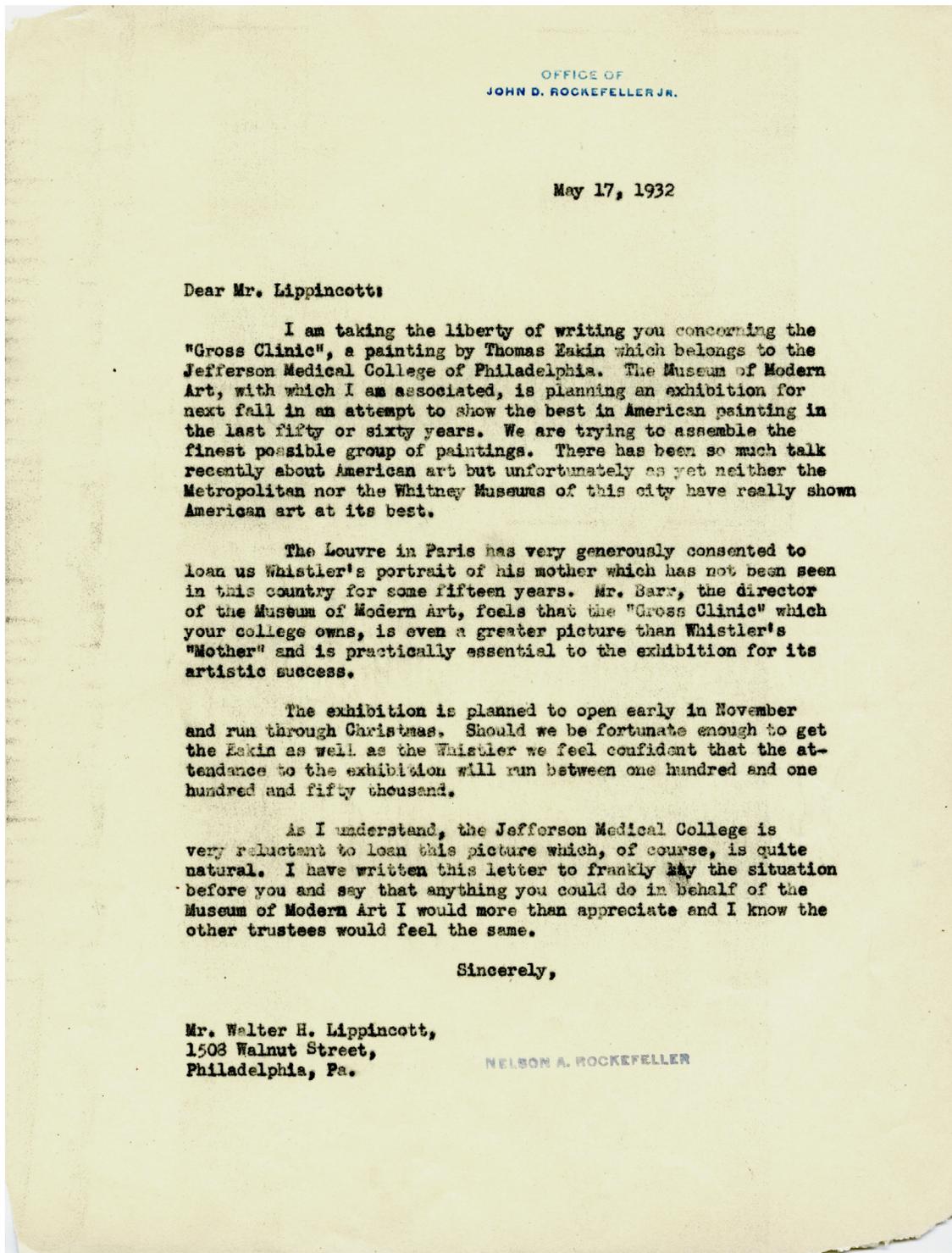
Letter from A. Conger Goodyear
to Nelson A. Rockefeller
October 27, 1931

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1933](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 7



Letter from Nelson A. Rockefeller
to Walter H. Lippincott
May 17, 1932

OFFICE OF
JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER JR.

May 17, 1932

Dear Mr. Lippincott:

I am taking the liberty of writing you concerning the "Gross Clinic", a painting by Thomas Eakin which belongs to the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia. The Museum of Modern Art, with which I am associated, is planning an exhibition for next fall in an attempt to show the best in American painting in the last fifty or sixty years. We are trying to assemble the finest possible group of paintings. There has been so much talk recently about American art but unfortunately as yet neither the Metropolitan nor the Whitney Museums of this city have really shown American art at its best.

The Louvre in Paris has very generously consented to loan us Whistler's portrait of his mother which has not been seen in this country for some fifteen years. Mr. Barr, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, feels that the "Gross Clinic" which your college owns, is even a greater picture than Whistler's "Mother" and is practically essential to the exhibition for its artistic success.

The exhibition is planned to open early in November and run through Christmas. Should we be fortunate enough to get the Eakin as well as the Whistler we feel confident that the attendance to the exhibition will run between one hundred and one hundred and fifty thousand.

As I understand, the Jefferson Medical College is very reluctant to loan this picture which, of course, is quite natural. I have written this letter to frankly lay the situation before you and say that anything you could do in behalf of the Museum of Modern Art I would more than appreciate and I know the other trustees would feel the same.

Sincerely,

Mr. Walter H. Lippincott,
1508 Walnut Street,
Philadelphia, Pa.

NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1933](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 8

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

ALFRED H. BARR, JR., DIRECTOR
JERE ABBOTT, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
MARY SANDS, SECRETARY
CARY ROSS, ASSISTANT

730 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK CITY
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7471
CABLE ADDRESS: MODERNART

December 1, 1931

Dear Nelson:

In our telephone conversation yesterday I suggested that I might write you a very brief summary of our financial problem so that you might lay the matter before your Junior Advisory Committee. My purpose in suggesting this is not to solicit funds from the Advisory Committee but to inform them and to make them a party to our problem.

A brief statement of the accomplishments of the Museum and of its future exhibition plans, and so forth was sent you in a letter from Mr. Goodyear dated November 7th. I will not resume this letter but confine myself to the problem reduced to its simplest terms.

The Museum's two years of experiment closed last June. According to the program announced in the autumn of 1929 if these two years were successful the Museum would proceed with establishing itself as a permanent institution.

Now at the beginning of the third year conditions have made it impossible to realize this program as it was originally planned. Instead a second period of trial seems necessary.

The lease on the present gallery expires April 30th, 1932. Either we must renew the lease or take the building at 11 West 53rd Street.

The present quarters are inadequate for the work which has to be done at present and would make any future expansion of the Museum's activities impossible.

The provisional bequest of the Bliss Collection makes gallery space for the permanent collection necessary.

The first two years of the Museum's existence were paid for by a subscription of a little over \$100,000. a year. Before signing the lease on the 53rd Street house the Trustees passed a motion requiring a pledge of \$80,000. a year for three years. They did not feel that they could sign the lease until the Museum's future had been underwritten to this extent.

TRUSTEES OF THE MUSEUM: A. CONGER GOODYEAR, PRESIDENT, MISS L. F. BLISS, VICE PRESIDENT, MRS. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR., TREASURER, SAMUEL A. LEWISOHN, SECRETARY, WILLIAM T. ALDRICH, JAMES W. BARNEY, FREDERIC CLAY BARTLETT, STEPHEN C. CLARK, MRS. W. MURRAY CRANE, FRANK CROWNINGSHIELD, CHESTER DALE, DUNCAN PHILLIPS, MRS. RAINEY ROGERS, MRS. CHARLES C. RUMSEY, ARTHUR SACHS, PAUL J. SACHS, JOHN T. SPAULDING, MRS. CORNELIUS J. SULLIVAN, JOHN HAY WHITNEY

Letter from Alfred H. Barr, Jr.
Nelson A. Rockefeller
December 1, 1931

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1933](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 8 continued

-2-

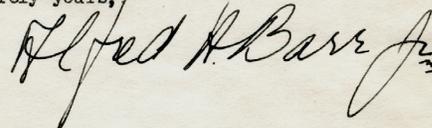
The Trustees decided last spring not to hire any professional assistance in raising money. Neither the finance committee nor the President nor the Treasurer would take the responsibility though both Mr. Goodyear and Mrs. Rockefeller have done a great deal toward raising whatever funds we have in hand.

At the present time ~~some~~ \$55,000. have been raised for the expenses of the year 1931-32. Less than \$10,000. have been subscribed for the following two years.

Mrs. Rockefeller has asked me to take charge of raising the money. I have done this with the greatest reluctance since I do not feel equipped to undertake what is really a professional problem. At the present time I am working with Mrs. Seaver attempting to round up the Trustees and to bring pressure to bear upon them to write to their friends who have subscribed to the Museum previously and to any others that might prove possible subscribers.

If any members of the Advisory Committee have suggestions to make or possible subscribers in mind our Trustees would much appreciate their communicating with Mrs. Seaver or myself.

Sincerely yours,



Nelson Rockefeller, Esq.
25 Broadway
New York City

Letter from Alfred H. Barr, Jr.
Nelson A. Rockefeller
December 1, 1931

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1933](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E;
Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 9

ARCHIVAL COPY

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1958

229

Rebirth of a Museum

The reopening of the Museum of Modern Art today is a notable event—both for art and for fire protection. It marks the completion of a million-dollar job of renovation and reconstruction, begun before the disastrous fire of last April 15, and greatly expanded because of it. The fire, it will be remembered, swept through the flammable temporary walls and partitions on the second floor in the middle of a busy day, taking a toll of one life and of injuries to thirty firemen and visitors. But, due to the heroic work of the staff and volunteers recruited by Director d'Harnoncourt, only two of the \$4,000,000 worth of paintings were destroyed and only six others damaged.

Today's opening is a welcome occasion to congratulate the museum's officers for the thorough and conscientious way they have seen to it that no such tragedy can occur again and given museums and exhibitors everywhere a model of how to protect art objects from the hazards of fire. What they have done, in fact, goes far beyond the minimum requirements of the law and of Fire and Building Department regulations. For example, a new fireproof stairwell tower has been added to the outside of the building, connecting all floors with the garden outside. Walls and partitions, both permanent and movable, have been made strictly fireproof.

And the reopening ceremonies have given Nelson A. Rockefeller, chairman of the board of trustees, a good chance to tell of the further improvement and expansion which are being planned to meet the rapidly growing public demand for what the museum does, and can, offer. It has won a unique place in American cultural life, one which should never lack for adequate financial support.

"Rebirth of a Museum,"
The New York Times
October 8, 1958

[Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1952-1958](#)

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E; Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 10

ARCHIVAL COPY

Televised Art Instruction Series Draws an Audience of All Ages

NY TIMES

JUL 25 1952

By DOROTHY BARCLAY

Apparently it is a tossup whether adults or children are getting more from the Museum of Modern Art's televised art instruction series, but judging further from letters submitted by viewers, it is obvious each group is deriving plenty. A study of the 2,500 letters and samples of work received at Station WNBT since "Through the Enchanted Gate" began on May 11 indicates the wide range of persons of various ages who have found the program stimulating and educational.

Victor D'Amico, director of the museum's Department of Education and People's Art Center and producer of the television show, said yesterday that he and other art specialists concerned with the program were somewhat surprised and extremely pleased to see how well the new approach to art they are stressing has been understood and taken up by viewers both young and grown-up.

For sometime before the start of the program, which is televised on Channel 4 from 12:30 to 1 P. M. on Sundays, Mr. D'Amico had expressed concern over those TV "drawing lessons" that teach children to copy stereotyped cartoons and pictures.

Creative Power Seen Curbed

Copying, color books and other devices that encourage imitation or competition destroy a child's power to create, Mr. D'Amico holds. He contends that children need, instead of these time fillers, an opportunity to say through art what they think and feel. Although the work produced in this process may look crude and immature to adults, it is highly expressive and personal. The object of the program, Mr. D'Amico declared, is to emphasize that all children are creative and that art experience should not be limited to the talented only.

Three thousand requests have been received for copies of a children's guide for the program, Mr. D'Amico reported. Teachers, parents, nursery-school directors, a hospital ward worker, students of education, camp counselors, a Brownie Scout leader and a high

school chairman of fine arts have been as anxious for copies as the youngsters for whom it was written.

One of Mr. D'Amico's favorite anecdotes about the program was told him by the mother of a 4-year-old. Parents and child were watching together the first day, she related, when the project was to make "a feeling picture" by pasting or stapling to cardboard bits of material with interesting textures. While the mother watched fascinated, the youngster slipped away. The child must be bored by the program, the mother decided and she went right on looking. Five or ten minutes later, the youngster was back, toting odd and ends from all over the house to make his own "feeling picture."

Childless Couple Moved

Of the same program, a childless couple wrote: "We were moved by this new medium of expression for children, a most exciting way for the young to better see and appreciate the miracle of the world around them."

Ted Cott, vice president of NBC and general manager of Stations WNBC and WNBT, planned the program with Mr. D'Amico. Ber Grauer, the commentator, also has been a student in the museum's art classes. The programs are being filmed and it is planned to make prints available on a rental basis to art educators, schools and museums throughout the country for their own educational and training purposes.

So far as parents are concerned, however, probably the program's greatest contribution to family harmony was summed up in the following statement of two youngsters: "We don't care if it rains next week-end. We are going to paint in our old-shirt smocks!"

"Televised Art Instruction Series
Draws an Audience of All Ages,"
The New York Times
July 25, 1952

Museums - Museum of Modern Art, 1952-1958

Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Cultural Interests - Series E; Museums; Rockefeller Archive Center.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURE

This workshop takes 2.5 hours to complete.

Part 1 Personal connections to primary sources

Begin the workshop in a whole group setting. Tap into background knowledge by asking the students about their experience working with primary sources.

Ask students to share with partners examples of primary sources they create on a daily basis to establish a personal connection with the subject matter and then share out as a whole group.

Next, engage students in a conversation about constructing a project from fragmentary research; the use of documents to create a compelling research question; and how to bridge the gap as researchers between what information is there and what is not.

Introduce students to the KWHL framework as a way to familiarize themselves with the primary sources in this workshop. The students will work independently, in small groups, and in a whole group to complete a detailed organizer of what they know, what they want to know, how they will find/learn what they want to know, and what they've learned throughout the workshop.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURE

Part 2 Introduction to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and MoMA, curated set of sources, and KWHL sections

Share some background information about Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and MoMA and then provide the students with the curated set of primary sources to analyze.

Students will work independently on the K section of the KWHL framing document. Instruct the students to cite what they include in the section as they go, rather than waiting until the end of the workshop.

Divide the students will share in small groups and have them share out what they included in the K section of the organizer.

Students will independently work on the W section of the framing document and then generate two to three research questions.

In a whole group, ask students to share out their research questions.

For the H section of the organizer, ask students to provide three more sources where they plan to find additional information about what they want to know/ their research questions. All primary and secondary sources should be cited in the H section.

In the L section of the document, ask the students to reflect on what they learned from the workshop, primary sources, AAR, and MoMA.

REFLECTION

As a whole group, ask the students to reflect on the workshop with the following questions:

- What was most challenging?
- What skills did you hone?
- How can you connect the work to other classes and daily life?
- Was the workshop what you expected?
- What would you change about the workshop?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[MoMA Archives Library](#)

Museum of Modern Art

[Photo Essay: A Mother, a Son, and Modern Art](#) (2020)

by Liesel Vink

Rockefeller Archive Center RE:source

[MoMA Through Time](#)

Museum of Modern Art

Inventing the Modern: Untold Stories of the Women

“*Who Shaped the Museum of Modern Art* (2024)

by Ann Temkin and Romy Silver-Kohn (editors)

[Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and American Modernism at MoMA](#) (2025)

by Eliza Butler

Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports

Art in Our Time (2004)

by Glenn Lowry, Michelle Elligott (editor), Harriet Schoenholz Bee (editor)

WORKSHOP MATERIALS

KWHIL Graphic Organizer

What I Know	What I Want to Know	How I Will Find Information (Cite Sources)	What I Learned
K	W	H	L

ABOUT US



Marissa Vassari is Education Program Manager at the Rockefeller Archive Center. She specializes in developing educational outreach project models that build research and information literacy skills. Marissa regularly presents at conferences on her work, and in 2016, she created the Archival Educators Roundtable, which facilitates communication among professionals who use primary sources in public outreach and teaching. She holds a BA in Psychology and Special Education, an MA in Childhood Education, and an MLIS degree with an Archival Studies specialization.



Danielle N. Gilman is an Assistant Professor in Residence in English at the University of Connecticut and the First-Year Writing Coordinator at its Stamford Campus. Danielle's research interests include modernist women writers, twentieth-century literary criticism, and archival studies. Her work has appeared in *Woolf Studies Annual*, the *Journal of Modern Literature*, and the *South Atlantic Review*.

ABOUT US

The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) is a major repository and research center dedicated to the study of philanthropy. The RAC's Research & Education Program develops and makes available archive-based interdisciplinary projects and curricula for levels ranging from elementary to graduate study. These materials support the development of information literacy and research skills, as well as deeper engagement with history and historical practice. The program also works to strengthen the bridge between education and archives through workshops and discussions facilitated by the RAC-hosted Archival Educators Roundtable.

CONTACT

15 Dayton Avenue
Sleepy Hollow, NY 10591

www.rockarch.org

education@rockarch.org

